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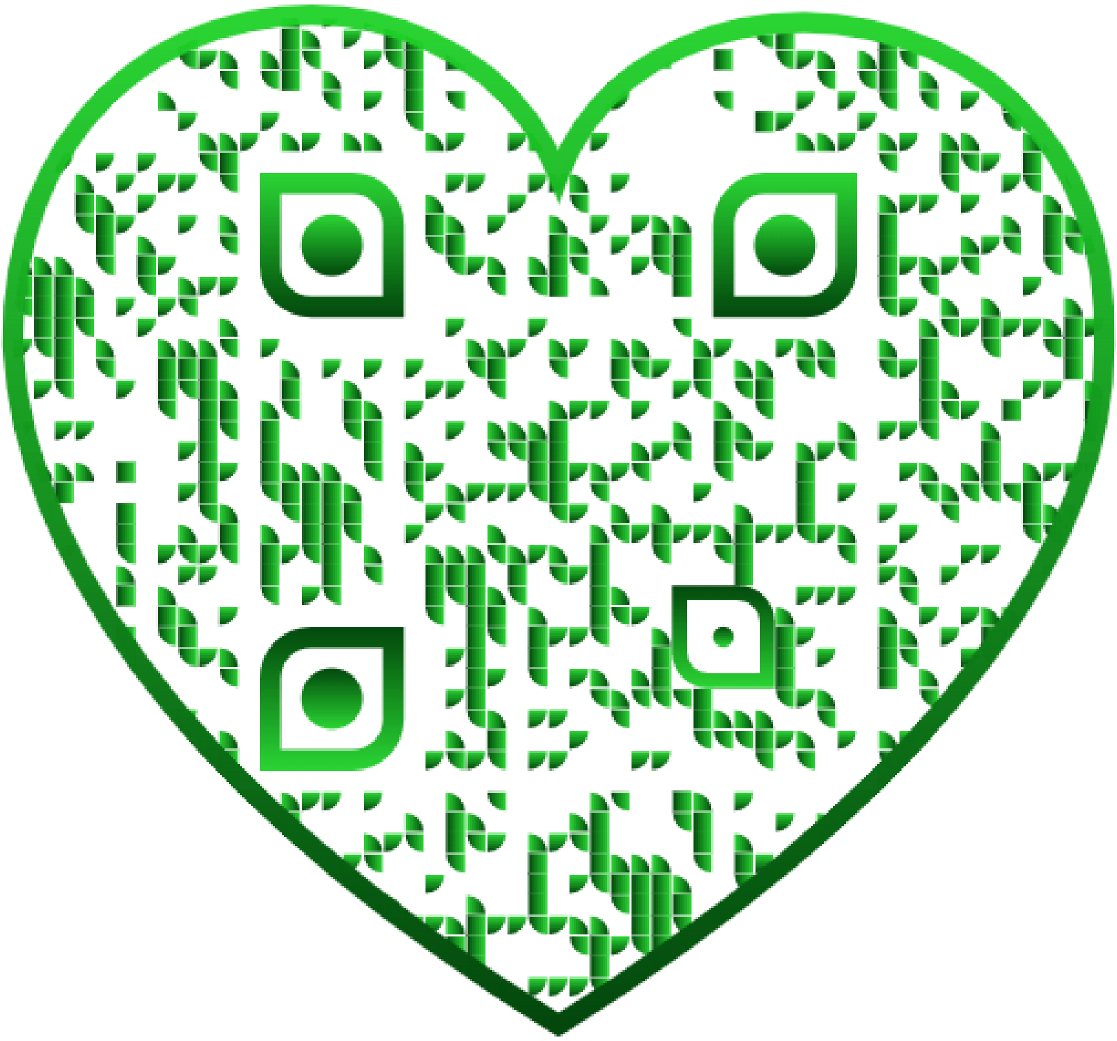

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Speed & power

FROM LARGE, autobahn-bred saloons to nimble, open-top roadsters, one truth has defined Mercedes-Benz throughout the decades; as many of the cars featured in this issue prove, speed and power have always been part of the equation.

Take our cover car and Seventies legend, the 450 SEL 6.9. It might be a reasonably discreet luxury saloon thanks to a 6.9-litre V8 resulting in genuine muscle car brawn, it's still capable of humiliating sports cars before cruising at triple-digit speeds without breaking a sweat.

Fast forward to the Eighties and the America market SL560 continued the tradition of big engined cars. It wasn't just a luxury convertible; thanks to its 5.6-litre V8 (the largest engine fitted to an SL at the time) it was a grand tourer, designed to devour highways with authority. Yet looking little different from smaller engined R107s, it was a reminder that power doesn't need to shout.

The SL560 might have had the largest engine fitted to an SL at the time, but it remained a discreet GT

Then came the 190E 3.2 AMG, Mercedes' compact saloon but now with a hooligan's heart. Before the AMG badge became mainstream, this car whispered the brand's potential wild side, delivering high-revving excitement in a family-friendly shell.

Decades later, the SLK, a compact roadster introduced in the late Nineties, carried the same DNA. Nimble, aggressive, and surprisingly quick, proving Mercedes' commitment to performance wasn't limited to size or class.

Across time, designs, and markets, Mercedes-Benz has never lost sight of what's important. Whether it's a powerful engine or a finely tuned chassis, speed and power remain inseparable from the Three-Pointed Star.

Paul Walton
Editor
Classic Mercedes

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ALL MODELS
SPECS & VALUES!
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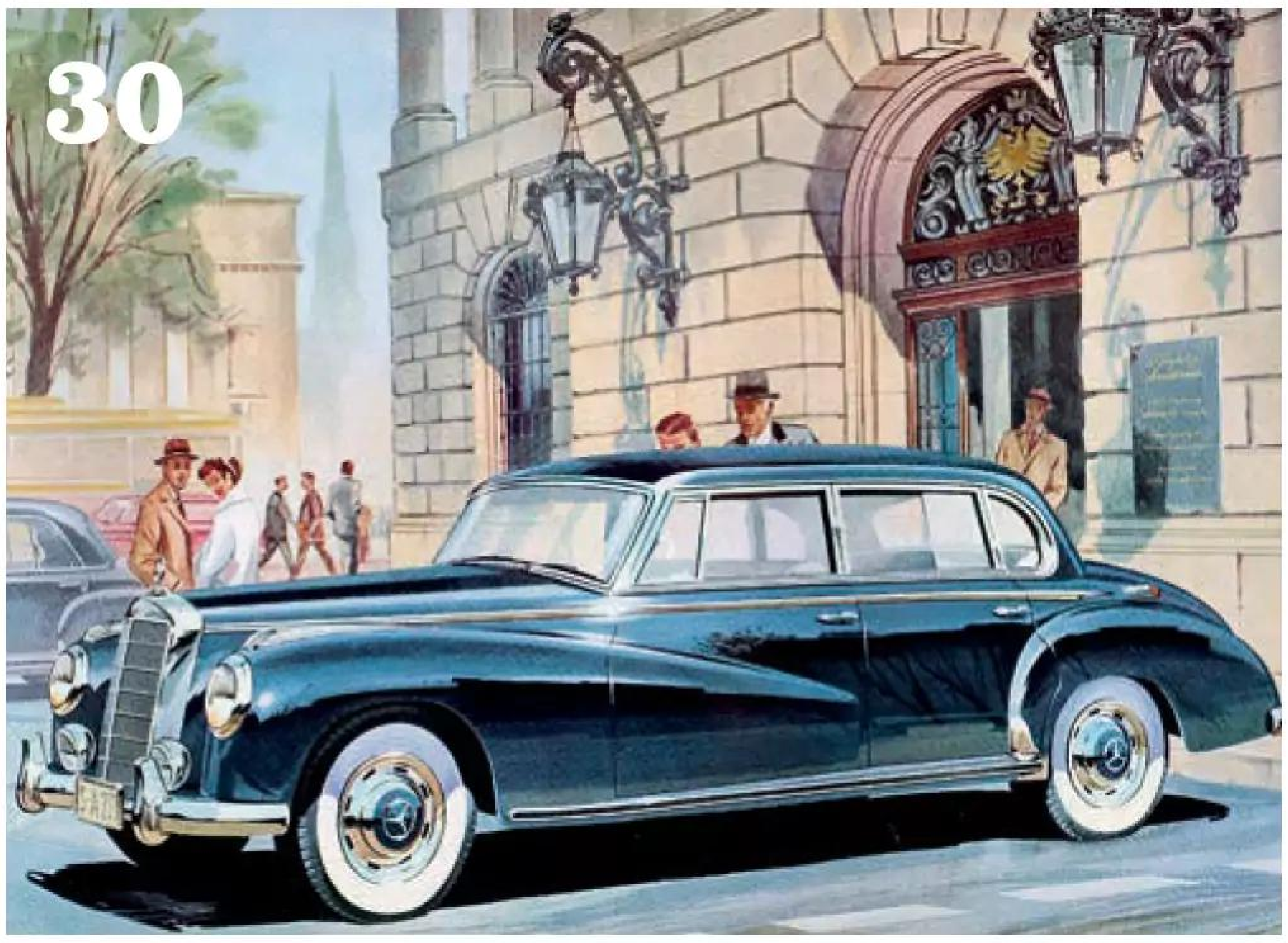
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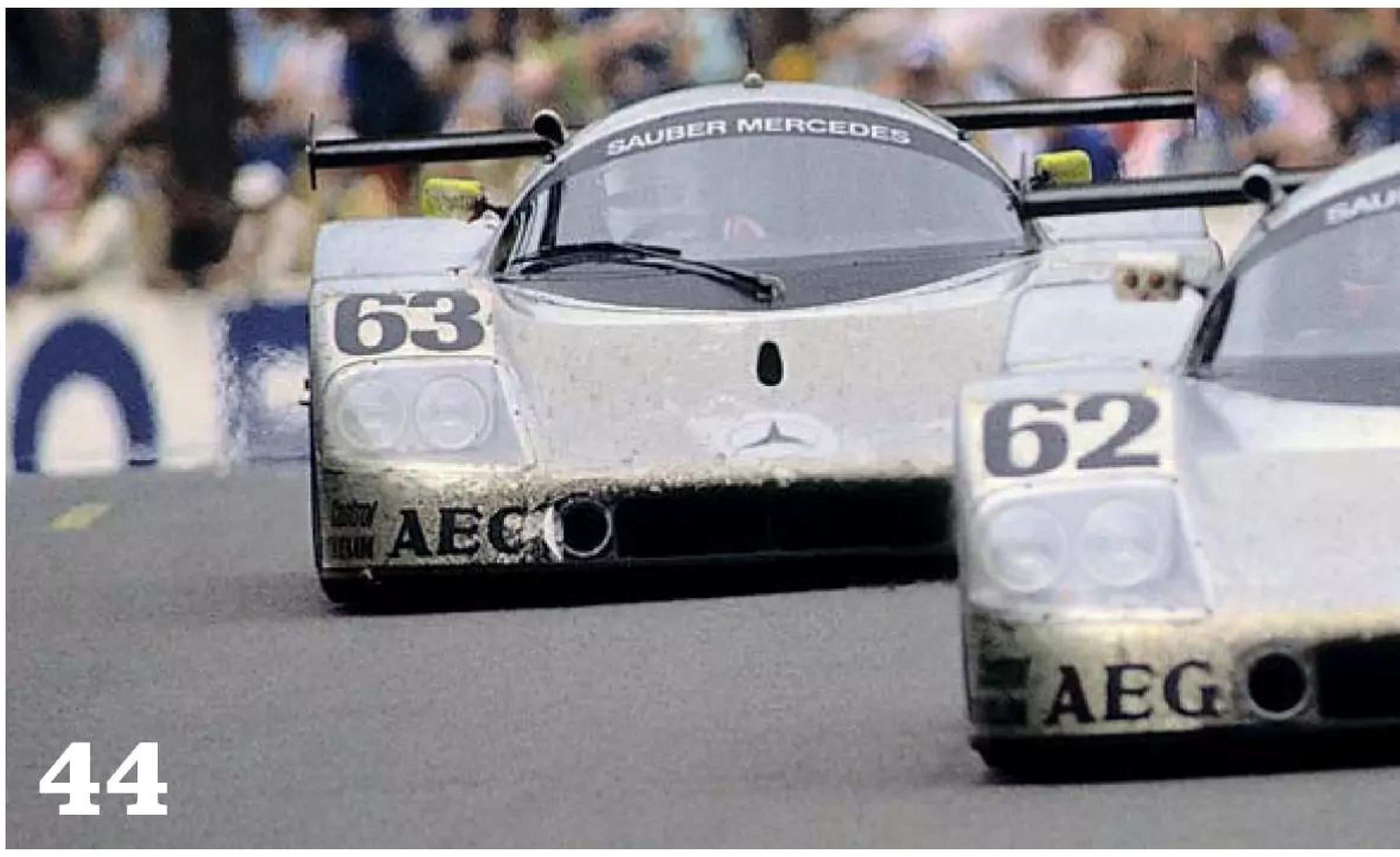
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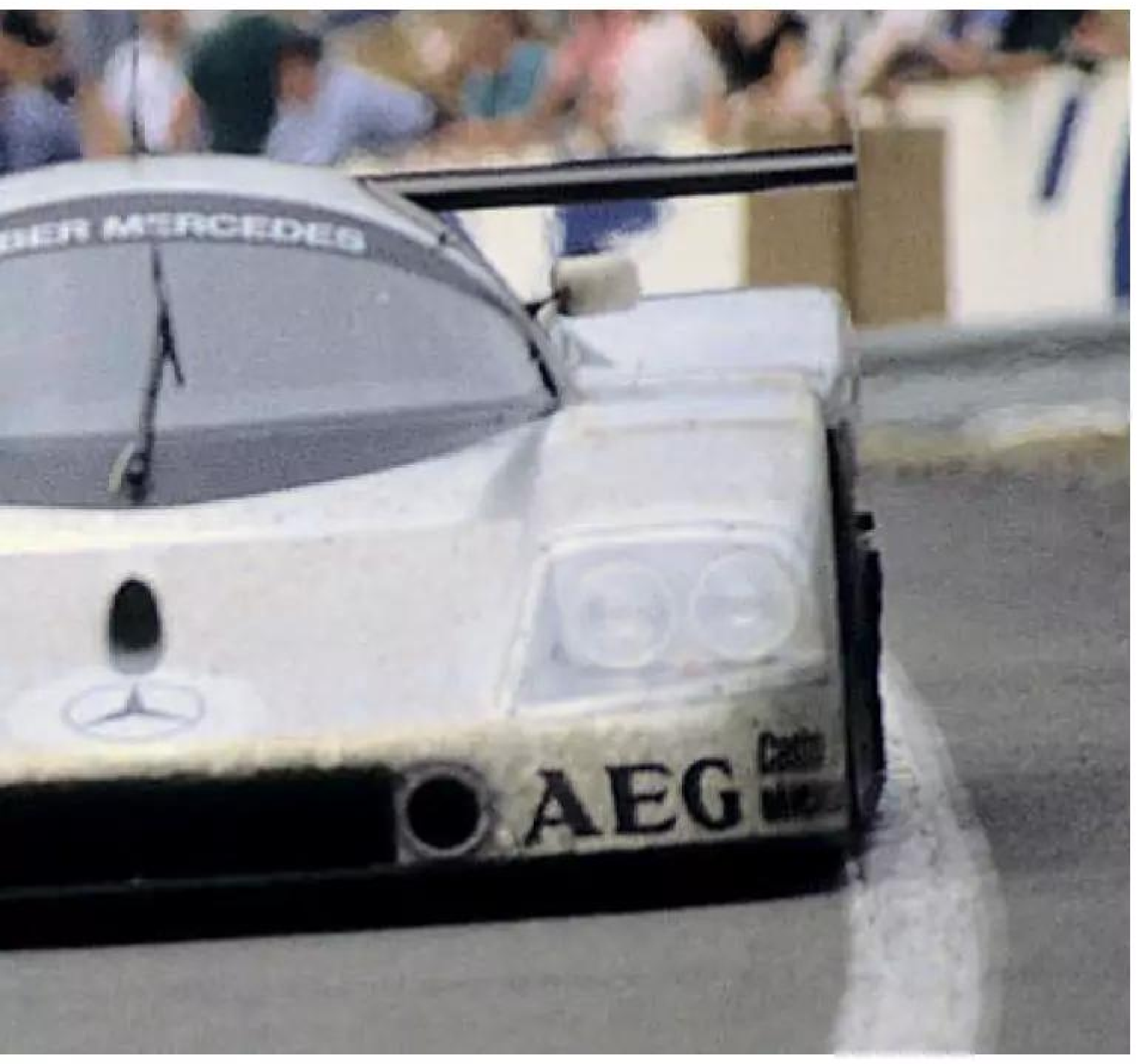

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NEWS

UK AND INTERNATIONAL REPORTS FROM THE MERCEDES WORLD

AMG Concept GT XX

A glimpse into the brand's electric future

MERCEDES-AMG has unveiled its most ambitious electric vision yet—the Concept GT XX, a wild, four-door EV that blends AMG's signature performance edge with futuristic tech and design. Revealed last week in Affalterbach, the concept isn't just a design study – it's a clear marker of where AMG is headed as it transitions into the electric age.

The GT XX is powered by a triple-motor setup – two compact axial-flux motors at the rear and one up front – producing a massive 1,341hp. These motors, developed by YASA, are smaller and lighter than traditional EV motors but pack more power, promising brutal acceleration and top speeds over 220 mph. It's the kind of performance AMG enthusiasts expect, just delivered differently.

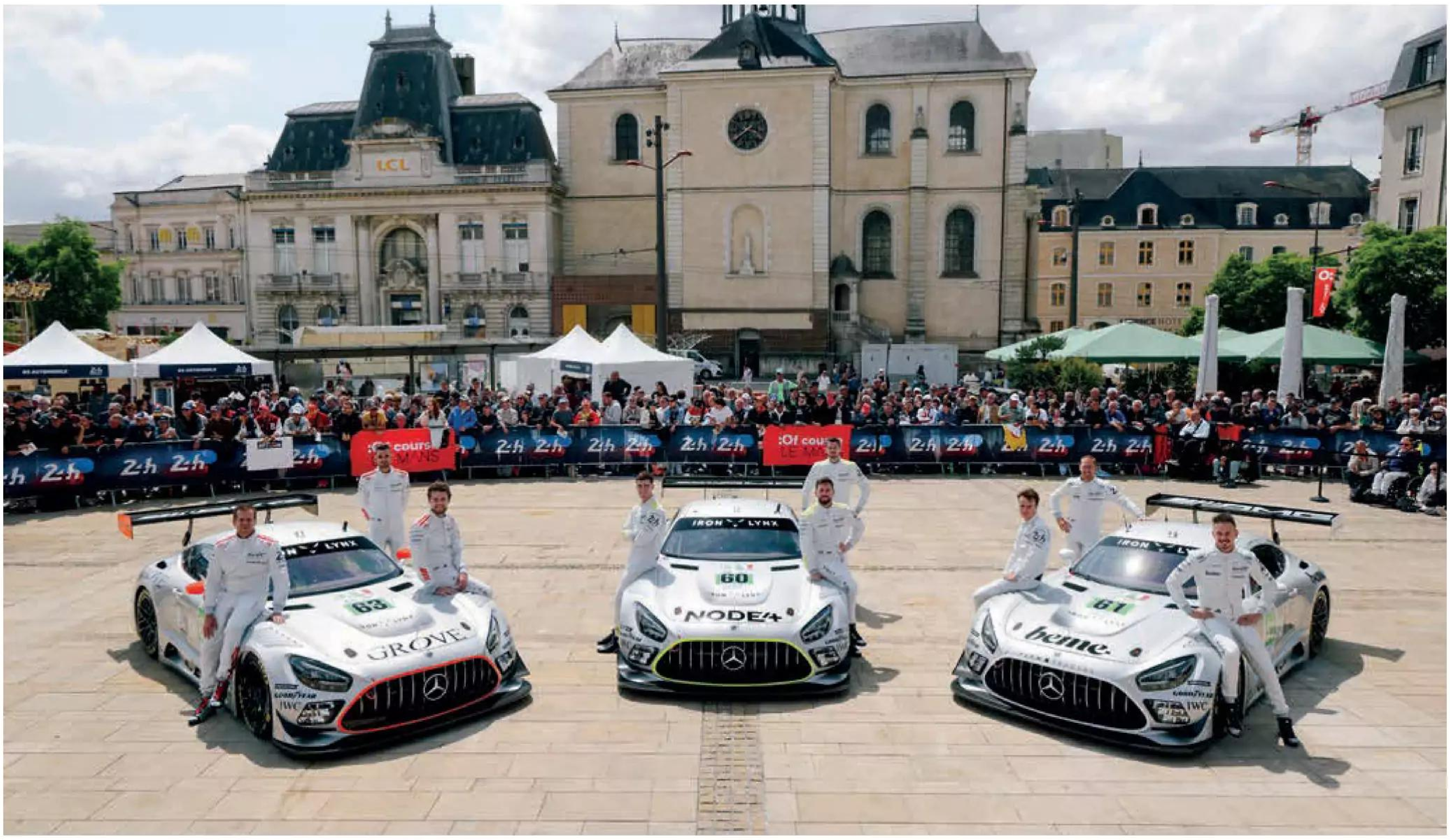
Backing it all is a high-tech battery system running at over 800 volts. It's packed with advanced NCMA cells and uses direct liquid cooling to keep temperatures in check under hard driving. Mercedes claims the setup can handle ultra-fast charging, adding about 250 miles of range in just five minutes – if the infrastructure can support it.

While the numbers are impressive, the car's design is equally attention-grabbing. The sleek shape is punctuated by aggressive aero features – active diffusers, a deployable airbrake, and trick cooling tech in the wheels – all aimed at keeping things efficient and planted at speed. Even the rear end is futuristic, with six round tail lights and a programmable LED strip that can display custom messages or light sequences. To link it to Mercedes' famous experimental cars of the Seventies, namely the C111, the GT XX has been painted in a similar shade of lurid orange.

Inside, the cabin takes cues from motorsport rather than luxury lounges. Deep, lightweight bucket seats are made with 3D-printed padding, while the rest of the interior leans on sustainable materials and exposed metal. Screens are everywhere, but not overwhelming, and the yoke-style steering wheel gives a hint that this isn't meant to be your everyday EV.

AMG says the GT XX won't go into production exactly as shown, but much of what's under the skin will carry over to its first standalone electric model, set to arrive in 2026. For now, the Concept GT XX shows that AMG isn't just dipping its toes into electric power – it's diving in headfirst, with plenty of power and flair in tow.

Mercedes makes solid return to Le Mans



MERCEDES-AMG made a noteworthy return to the 24 Hours of Le Mans in 2025, fielding three Mercedes-AMG GT3 cars in the newly introduced LMGT3 class. This marked the brand's first factory-backed appearance at Le Mans since 1999. Partnering with Iron Lynx, Mercedes entered the iconic endurance race with high hopes of reestablishing its presence in top-tier GT competition.

The three entries – cars #60, #61, and #63 – were each piloted by diverse international driver lineups. The #60 car featured Andrew Gilbert, Lorcan Hanafin, and Fran Rueda; #61 was driven by Martin Berry, Lin Hodenius, and Maxime Martin; and the #63 lineup included Brenton Grove, Stephen Grove, and Luca Stolz.

Across the gruelling 24-hour race, all three Mercedes-AMG GT3s successfully reached the finish line – an achievement in itself given the unpredictable nature of endurance racing. The best-finishing car, the #61, completed 337 laps and placed 45th overall. The #63 finished 48th in class with 334 laps, while the #60 completed 329 laps, placing 61st overall.

While none of the entries reached the LMGT3 podium – claimed by Porsche's Manthey EMA squad – the outing was viewed as a solid foundation for Mercedes-AMG's future in endurance racing. The cars showed strong reliability and consistency, completing their first 24-hour race at Le Mans without major mechanical issues.

Mercedes-AMG emphasized that the experience gained at Le Mans will play a key role in the continued development of their customer racing program. The return to La Sarthe signals AMG's intent to stay competitive in the FIA World Endurance Championship and further develop the GT3 platform.

CLA 45 S "Final Edition"

MERCEDES-AMG has revealed the CLA 45 S 4MATIC+ "Final Edition", a limited-run model that marks the end of the current CLA 45 S generation. With production nearing its conclusion, this exclusive version celebrates the high-performance compact coupe's legacy with distinctive styling and upgraded features.

Limited in availability, the "Final Edition" stands out with AMG Aerodynamics and Night Packages as standard, giving it a sharper, more aggressive look. The front apron features larger air intakes, while the rear sports a pronounced diffuser and fixed AMG rear wing. Dark accents and gloss black trim elements further enhances its bold presence.

The model is available in several striking finishes, including Mountain Grey Magno and Patagonia Red, and rides on 19in forged AMG wheels in a matte black cross-spoke design with aero elements and red brake callipers.

Inside, the "Final Edition" includes AMG Performance front seats in black MB-Tex/microfiber with yellow contrast stitching, carbon trim, and an edition-specific badge on the centre console. AMG's latest steering wheel and illuminated door sills round out the exclusive interior.

Under the bonnet, the CLA 45 S retains its 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder, producing 421bhp and launching from 0–62mph in just 4.1 seconds with AMG Performance 4MATIC+ all-wheel drive and Drift Mode.

Mercedes-AMG has not disclosed exact production numbers, but the Final Edition signals the brand's move toward electrification and next-generation compact performance. With its blend of exclusivity, performance, and design, the CLA 45 S Final Edition serves as a high-octane farewell to an iconic AMG model.

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Mercedes SLC (C107), 2.8-4.5, 01/72-09/81
JP no. 8320600200 // Ref. no. MB-35071

Intermediate pipe, length 730 mm

Fits:
Mercedes Heckflosse (W111/112), 2.8, 01/67-12/71
Mercedes Pagoda (W113), 2.3-2.8, 07/63-03/71
JP no. 8320400100 // Ref. no. MB-35132

Intermediate exhaust

Fits:
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Mercedes Pagoda (W113), 2.3-2.8, 07/63-03/71
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Exhaust rear, with two tail pipes

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Russell heads to Aintree

AHEAD of this year's British Grand Prix, current Mercedes F1 driver, George Russell, headed to Aintree, home of the 1955 event, to drive a similar W196 Stirling Moss used to win the race.

Though the full three-mile lap could not be completed due to track decay, Russell's run still covered the original start-finish straight but circumvented some sections of the now-degraded circuit.

Standing next to the sleek silver machine in front of empty grandstands after his run, the Formula 1 star described the experience as "incredible," praising the car's noise, speed, and historic presence.

On Instagram, Russell reflected on the moment as "an immense privilege to drive the MercedesBenz W196 at Aintree," noting its deep connection to both Mercedes' motorsport heritage and Moss' seminal victory there 70 years earlier.

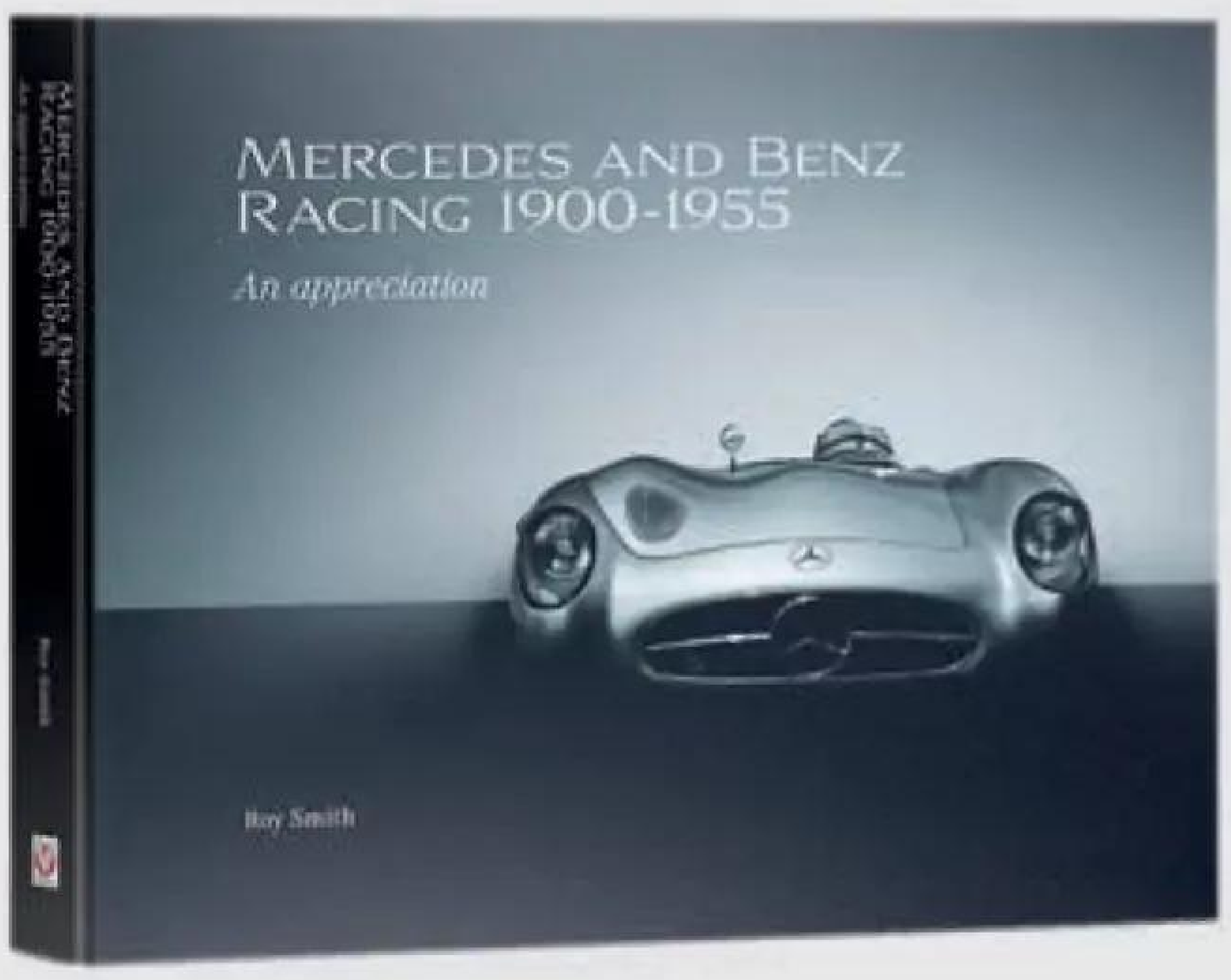
The W196, chassis 000 13/55, was the same example Fangio finished second in behind his British team mate. Russell's brief outings echoed the car's storied history, resurrecting the thunderous sound of its straight-eight engine at Aintree.

Book review

Newly published by Veloce Publishing comes this superb photo-rich volume that explains the first half decade of Mercedes and Benz racing.

From Daimler and Benz plus the birth of the Mercedes marque to its withdrawal from Grand Prix and Sports car racing in 1955, this sweeping history spans the golden era of motorsport. Encompassing Grands Prix and endurance epics such as the Mille Miglia, Targa Floria, and Carrera Pan America to record-breaking hill climbs and land speed challenges across Europe, the USA, and South America, the richly published volume covers it all.

The 600 word book is also packed with over 1,200 rare and evocative period images, many published here for the first time, helping to offset the £150 cover price.



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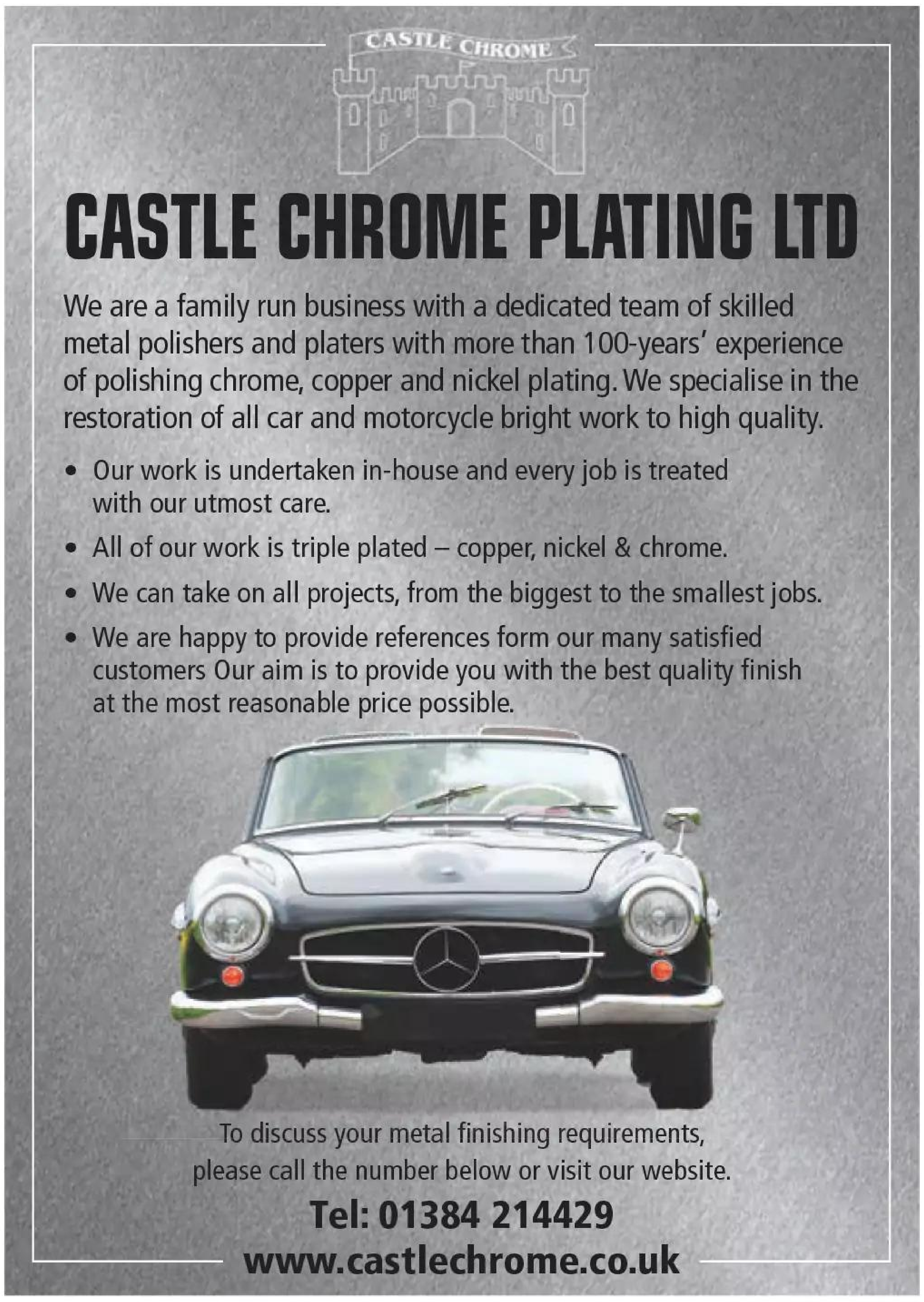

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Sam Skelton

The ease of Mercedes' maintenance

I'M GOING to start this column with an apology. On first glance, it might not at first appear to be very Mercedes-centric but stick with me; there's a Three-Pointed Star point to be made here.

I'm somewhat Catholic in my motoring tastes. I own Jaguars – as editor of our sister title, Jaguar World, you'd expect that – but also an old Range Rover, a Triumph Stag, and a number of oleopneumatic Citroëns. They all speak to different parts of me – old Leyland tat to my masochism and inherent love of the underdog, the Jaguars to my patriotic side, the Citroëns to the same part of me that finds Mercedes-Benzes so appealing; my love of good engineering.

Here's the thing though; good engineering manifests itself in entirely different ways.

As I write, my hands are shredded to pieces. Four fingers are missing lumps of skin, to say nothing of the half inch square patch oozing at the base of my right thumb. My forearms also ache having been contorted and stabbed by many car parts in the furtherance of my goal. It is deeply unpleasant. Major automotive surgery, obviously, to have bitten back so hard at my efforts? Well, no. Not really. You see, my fiancee's XM has rather more in common with a teabag than with a solid lump of steel, so we're using it as a donor car to revive the spare XM I have lying about. She will then be using that. One of the jobs it needs is a replacement speedo cable. Should be easy. Remove broken speedo cable. Remove intact cable from donor. Fit to project. Yet my hands are a mess and the first cable isn't completely out – the rubber grommet through the bulkhead is jammed behind the heater and eluding all my efforts at removal. I haven't even begun to get the good cable out of the donor yet.

A MERCEDES IS ENGINEERED LIKE NO OTHER CAR

Now there are many who would assume this is par for the course on car jobs. But I have never experienced it with a Mercedes. Every job – from rebuilding wings and bumpers to replacing lumps of rear suspension on S124s after bending them with bearing presses – has left me in much the same condition as when I began. With the exception of said rear suspension system nothing has ever seemed complicated for the sake of it, everything has come apart and gone back together nicely. When people say a Mercedes is engineered like no other car it's true – while other, more French marques have been more imaginative and creative Stuttgart has responded with simple good sense and well-considered approaches. A car manufacturer can be as innovative and different as it likes, but goodwill will evaporate the moment people learn a car is a pig to work on. That's not to say there's been no innovation from Mercedes-Benz; look at the majority of the things we take for granted today in a car and the odds are that in the early days you'd find them popularised by Mercedes. ABS, airbags, telescopic steering columns, safety cells, diesel engines, xenon headlamps, catalytic converters, Mercedes may not necessarily have invented them but it was the marque that saw their popularity explode. Nothing overly flashy, but solid, well considered engineering that has withstood the test of time.

Which is why instead of persevering with this XM, I'm tempted to go and buy my fiancée an SLK instead. Not only will it be nice to have a convertible for summer, but the odds of my hands staying in one piece will improve significantly… CM

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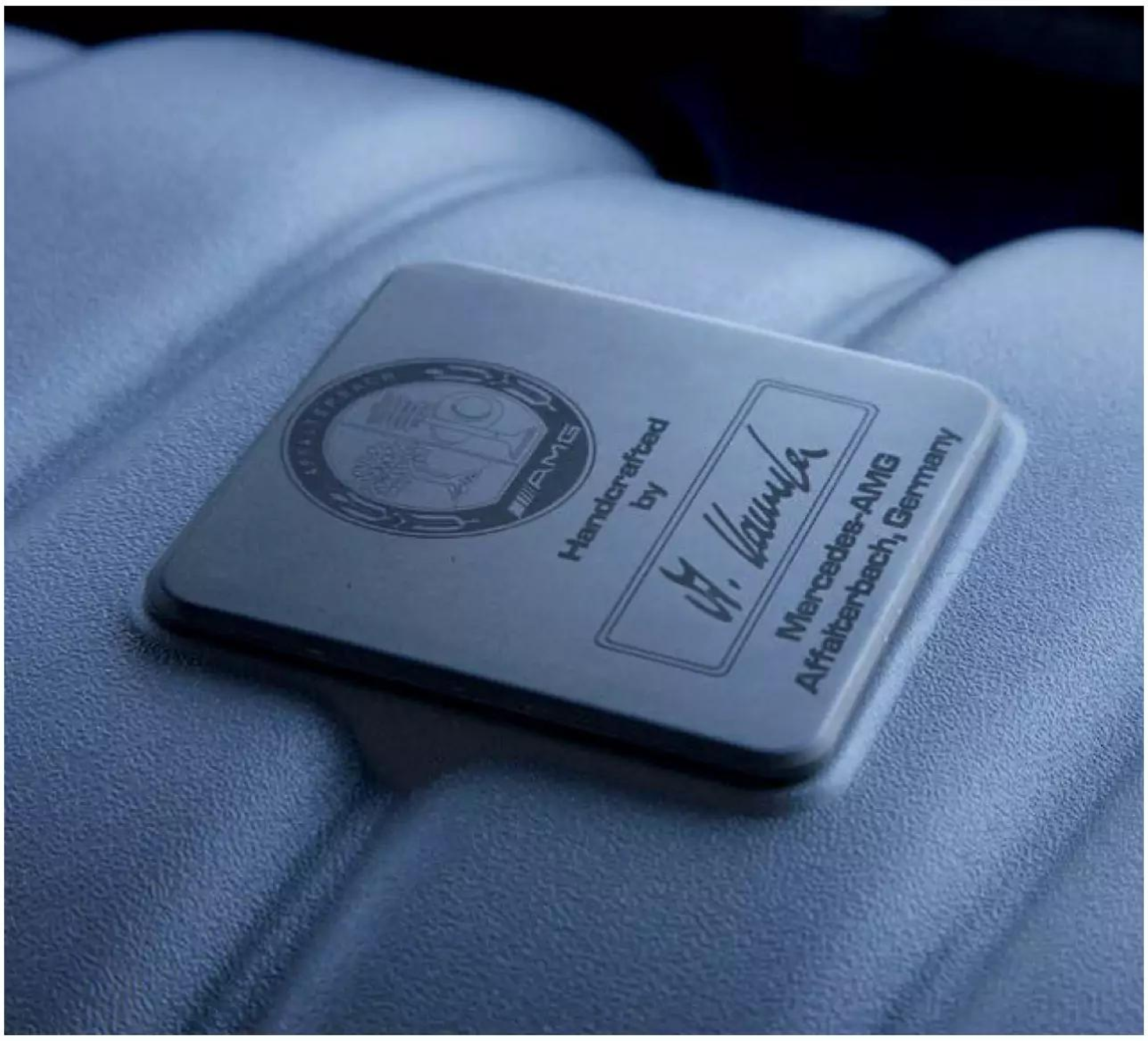
Robb Pritchard

The aura of an AMG engine

THERE'S A moment standing before an open AMG engine bay when your eyes drift from the maze of pipes and carbon-fibre plenums to a small, unassuming plaque atop the cam cover. In a world obsessed with horsepower and Nürburgring lap times, it's something that's quite easy to overlook. But for those who know, that little metal rectangle, engraved with a single technician's signature, is AMG's soul – a reminder that AMG still makes them like they used to.



AMG stands for Aufrecht, Melcher, and the town of Großaspach, where Aufrecht was born. Those letters started as a plan to take Mercedes engines and make them faster, stronger, and well… more alive, but over time they have come to embody perfection and an uncompromising commitment to craftsmanship. The plaque is testament to this.

This tradition began some twenty-five years ago as an extension of AMG's 'one man, one engine' philosophy. Perhaps, initially, it was intended as a clever marketing ploy, as who wouldn't want to own and drive a car with an engine that the engineer signed like a work of art, but it still endures to this day. And in an era when most engines are churned out on fully-automated production lines, every AMG V8, V12, and select inline-fours, are assembled start to finish by a single master technician, it still seems special. Old-school.

No conveyor belts in the workshop, just one person, a bench of precision tools, and a meticulous build process bordering on ritual. Miss a torque spec? Start over. Dyno test shows a deficit? Strip it down. Every stage is logged, torque settings recorded, components barcoded and tracked. If a unit fails anything in a thorough 12-point inspection, it's stripped back to parts. The process takes six to eight hours – a lightning quick time to assemble a performance engine, perhaps, but far more involved than the 90 minutes on the automated Mercedes line.

This AMG tradition still endures today, at least on the flagship V8 models. There's a romance here that's hard to quantify. In a world of disposable appliances and planned obsolescence, that plaque is an anomaly – so old-fashioned it feels quaint. What it's saying is, "This has been made by human hands by someone who cared enough to do it right." But there's more than nostalgia at play. The plaque is also a testament to AMG's relentless pursuit of quality. The technician's signature isn't just ceremonial – it's a final checkpoint in a process that leaves no room for error. If something goes wrong, there's no hiding behind anonymity. Responsibility rests with one person.

THIS AMG TRADITION STILL ENDURES TODAY, AT LEAST ON THE FLAGSHIP V8 MODELS

Today, though, the modern world is inexorably catching up. The V6s in the "43" models are built on a more conventional line and as AMG embraces hybridisation and electrification, one wonders how long the tradition can survive in its purest form.

Yet, for now, the plaque endures. In today's culture, "They don't make them like they used to" is (in most cases) true. But in a quiet corner of Affalterbach, there's still a place where they do. If you're lucky enough to own an AMG with a signed engine, you're part of that story – a story I hope continues for years to come. CM

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Available in black and whitewall

Matt James

Mercedes and Le Mans

THERE WAS always something special about Group C racing, which was the format for long-distance sportscar competition in the 1980 and still heralded to this day as one of its finest periods.

When it arrived in 1982, early adopter Porsche was the first to fully engage with the new rules set with its bespoke 956 which it very generously sold to customer teams to battle against the factory squad. Lancia was next but the Italians never seemed to suit the demands of the 1000km-plus races with its beautiful but hopelessly unreliable LC2 model. Ford came with the C100 but quickly left when there was a change of focus from the top brass. Even Aston Martin appeared briefly with the AMR-1.

Jaguar was next through the door with its Tom Walkinshaw Racing-tended machines, and it took the category to new heights with its gorgeous white and purple cars. But Mercedes was coming, and it would spark some of the most fearsome Group C monsters ever built.

To do this, Mercedes partnered with a Swiss racing team based in Hinwil run by Peter Sauber. He had shunned his family traffic light business to become a car constructor in the Seventies. After dabbling in long-distance racing late in his initial decade, when he returned to the class in 1982 with BMW-motivated machines, it set in motion the wheels which would bring the Three-Pointed Star to his door.

The story of that relationship is told elsewhere in this issue, but it is Mercedes' relationship with Le Mans which is perhaps the thorn in its side. While the Sauber-Mercedes machines were running at the front of the World Sportscar and World Sports-Prototype Championships, its track record at La Sathe is a different story.

THE SAUBER-MERCEDES STORY AT LE MANS WAS A DISAPPOINTING ONE

Mercedes has, of course, a dark history at the French track due to Pierre Levegh crashing into the crowd on the start-finish straight in 1955, killing more than 80 people. That prompted its immediate withdraw from motorsport but in a remarkable echo, Sauber's first attempt at Le Mans with Mercedes power in 1986 was thwarted when bull-strong Dane John Nielsen suffered an airborne crash, thought to have been caused by a tyre failure: he was lucky to escape unharmed.

The Sauber-Mercedes story at Le Mans was a disappointing one fraught with unreliability. In the period from 1987 through to 1991 when the programme was at its height it only finished on three of the occasions it entered across eight entries– although one of those was a 1-2 finish for the C9 in 1989 (shown).

When Mercedes returned to Le Mans in 1998 with the production-styled GT1 CLK-LM, it again struck mechanical gremlins with both cars. Worse followed in 1999 when Scotsman Peter Dumbreck's machine flipped into the trees. The driver was lucky to walk away with his life. Mercedes immediately withdrew from the event.

Mercedes returned to the twice-around-the-clock race this year with the Mercedes-AMG GT3 but it was a subdued race for the Italian-owned Iron Lynx team with 12th in class.

No matter what Mercedes does and no matter what it achieves in motorsport, Le Mans remains the one fruit which is sadly out of reach for the three-pointed star.

Matt is the editor of Motorsport News

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Power & glory

Arriving in 1975, by being both powerful yet discreet, the 450SEL 6.9 was the ultimate big Mercedes-Benz saloon of the Seventies. To mark the 50th anniversary of this V8 engined monster, we're looking at its history and why it remains so popular

WORDS **PAUL WALTON** PHOTOGRAPHY **ERIC RICHARDSON**

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FINCH MOTORS

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EVERYTHING YOU need to know about the 450SEL 6.9 can be gleaned from the car's appearance in the 1998 John Carpenter film, *Ronin*, that starred Robert De Niro and Jean Reno. With the storyline being a band of mercenaries on a top secret mission in the south of France, thanks to the 6.9's under the radar appearance yet huge amounts of power, it was exactly the kind of car hitmen like these would have chosen. Obviously the scenes when it's chasing a Citroën XM around the twisty roads above Nice with Robert De Niro firing rockets from the sunroof loses more than a little of that subtlety, it still showed what the then 23-year-car was capable of.

While the *Ronin* connection helped elevate the status of the 450SEL 6.9 in the minds of movie fans and car enthusiasts alike, even without its cinematic fame, the car remains a masterpiece of engineering and design. By looking little different from its lower powered brethren, the 6.9 has become highly prized by anyone who wants a sports car like performance but all the subtle luxury only a mid-Seventies Mercedes saloon can offer.

The company was no stranger dropping large engines into saloons, having done so with the W108. In 1966 test and development engineer, Erich Waxenberger, decided to try the same M100 6.3-litre V8 that powered the 600 in the 300SEL. Due to the differences in weight between the two cars yet the engine producing 250bhp, the result was a seriously fast car that according to legend caused another test driver to jump out in disbelief after he'd accelerated hard.

When the 300SEL 6.3 reached production in 1968, its 0-60mph time of 6.5 seconds and 136mph top speed made it the fastest production saloon in the world. It became the basis of AMG's first racing car, although its V8 had been stretched to 6.8 litres. Known as the Red Pig, the car came second in the 1971 24 Hours of Spa.

Just 6,500 300SEL 6.3s had

ABOVE
The 6.9's predecessor was the W108 300SEL 6.3 that arrived in 1968

been built when the W108 was replaced by the first generation of S-Class in 1972.

In terms of its design and technology, the new car – internally known as the W116 – was a huge leap forward for Mercedes-Benz. As the final design by Friedrich Geiger – whose previous work included the 300SL, W111 'Fintail' plus W113 and R107 SLs – the car would influence the brand's styling for the next decade and beyond.

The new saloon initially had the choice of just two engines – a 2.8-litre straight six and a 3.5 V8 – but at the 1973 Geneva Show it debuted a 4.5 V8 version that with 222bhp resulted in a 130mph top speed plus 0-60mph time of 8.5 seconds. At the same time, a limousine version, the SEL, was also shown that had an extra 4in inserted in the chassis to improve rear leg room. By being clever, well-equipped, spacious and powerful, it won the prestigious 1973 Car of the Year award

As *Autocar* said in its 4 May 1974 issue, "This luxurious model represents the very pinnacle of passenger car development.

Yet what there wasn't was a direct replacement for the 300SEL 6.3. A bigger-engined version of the W116 had always been promised with the German company admitting 300SEL 6.3 owners never ceased to complain about the lack of a worthy and suitable replacement. But due to the 1973 oil crisis, Mercedes' priority was strengthening the other end of the range and so introduced the 230/4, 240D and 240D 3.0.

But Mercedes finally relented and at the 1974 Geneva Motor Show in March the German company revealed the 450SEL 6.9. The heart of the car was a handmade 6,834cc version of the 6.3 – the largest V8 fitted to a European production car since World War Two – the extra capacity obtained by increasing the bore from the 103mm to 107. Other changes included the introduction of Bosch's K-Jetronic fuel injection system plus a forged crankshaft, conrods and pistons. Finally, to make the massive lump fit under the W116's bonnet, it was given a dry-sump lubrication.

Importantly for a country that had speed limit-less autobahns, the 6.9 was strong and long-lived, its strength proved by bench-testing every example, a process that took longer than four hours and included 40 minutes on the redline. And unlike other, more fragile performance engines that required work every time it left the garage, the 6.9's service intervals were every 12,000 miles.

Although the 450SEL 6.9 weighed a hefty 1,841kg (4,060lb), with the V8 producing 286bhp it was one seriously fast luxury saloon, reaching 60mph in a mere 7.2 seconds while its top speed was an autobahn-storming 140mph. To illustrate how fast this was for the time, the lighter and slipperier Ferrari 308 GTB that was launched the same year was a mere 0.5 of a second quicker to 60mph. It was, quite simply, a sports car in a saloon's body. "The car's acceleration is prestigious for its size and type," confirmed *Autocar* in March 1979.

Yet there was more to the 450SEL 6.9 than pure grunt since it came with a very extensive standard equipment package. Air conditioning, central locking, cruise control, power windows, headlamp cleaning system, velour upholstery and inertia-reel seat belts in both the front and rear seats were all standard, none of which was common in 1975. The only optional extras were an electric sunroof, the extremely rare Becker AT 160 S car phone plus the characteristic forged aluminium Fuchs wheels.

Then there was the suspension. Rather than the pneumatic suspension found in the 300 SEL 6.3, the new top-of-the-line model featured a hydropneumatic variant with hydraulic level control. The springs were retained but the telescopic dampers were replaced

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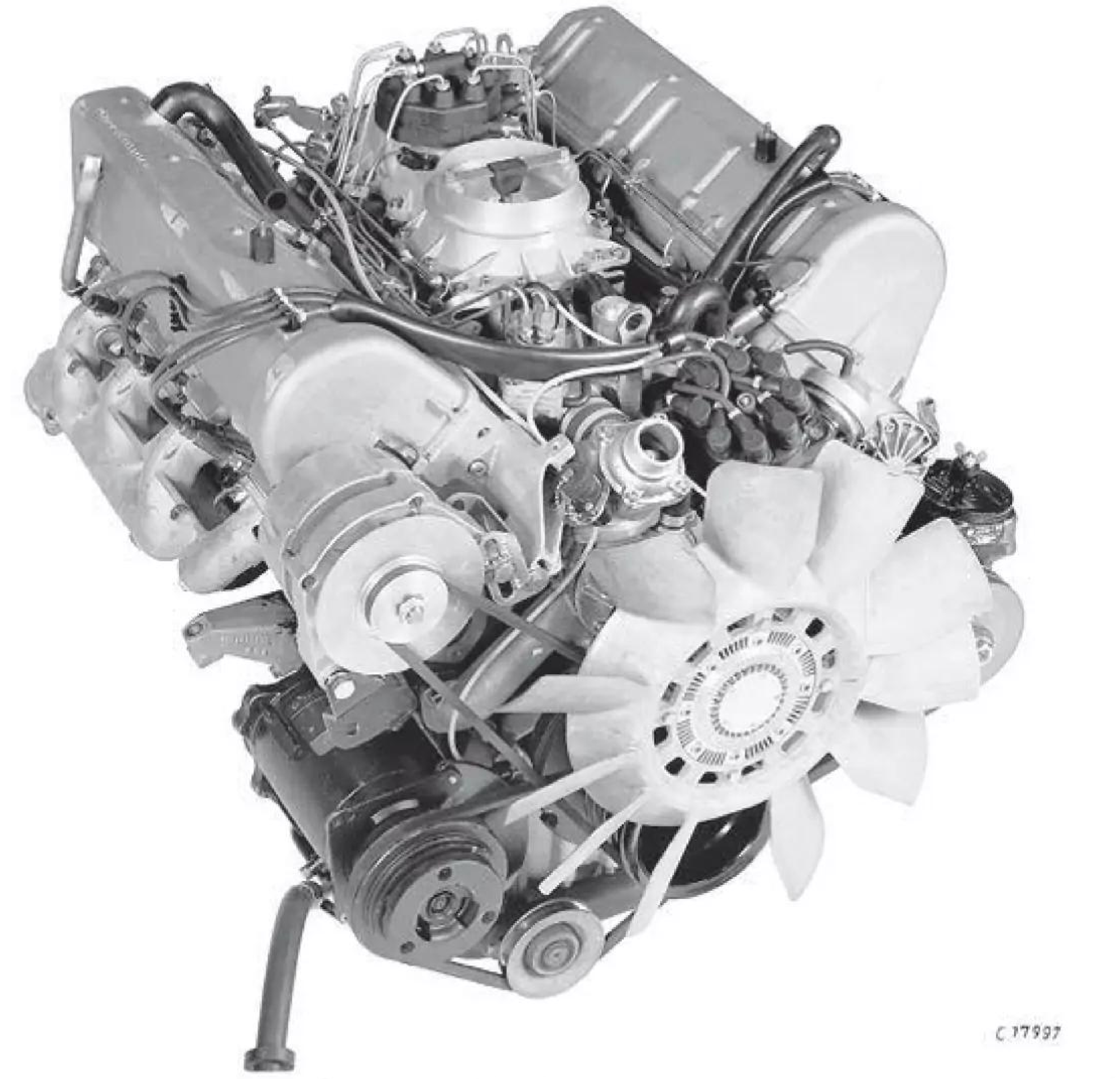
450 SEL 6.9
450 SEL 6.9

ABOVE
The 450SEL 6.9 made its official debut at the 1974 Geneva Motor Show

BELOW
The engineer responsible for dropping the 6.3 V8 into the W108 saloon was Erich Waxenberger



⇨ by hydropneumatic struts fed from a central pressure accumulator. Pressure was then supplied by a four piston positive-displacement engine-driven pump. As a result, the vehicle's ride height remains constant and the full spring travel always remains available.

Unlike Citroën's rubber belt/single pump method, Mercedes-Benz also added hard rubber dampers as temporary springs if the system failed. Plus unlike the French system, the 6.9's also maintained body level without squatting or diving during acceleration or braking. But although it could be raised or lowered by 1.6in, it couldn't sink to the ground like a Citroën could.

Unsurprisingly, none of this came cheap. When the 450SEL 6.9 first came to the UK in late 1975, it cost around £22,000, more than twice that of the richly appointed Daimler Double Six Vanden Plas. Even a long wheel base version of the Rolls Royce Silver Shadow was £20,500.

Arguably worse than the price, though, was its appalling economy; officially returning 17.7mpg, this could drop to as little as 11mpg. Admittedly petrol was considerably cheaper five decades ago than it is today, but unless you were a Texan oil baron, that would have still hurt.

It was perhaps due to this why out of half a million W116s produced between 1972 and 1980, just 7,380 were 450SEL 6.9s. This included 1,816 that went to North America from 1977 onwards that due to stringent emissions had a lower compression ratio, dropping the power to 250bhp.

And yet thanks to the car mix of discreet looks but huge power,

ABOVE LEFT
Heart of the car was a 6.9-litre version of Mercedes' M100 V8

they still became popular with anyone wanting a missile-fast yet luxurious limousine that looked little different from an entry 280. This included several racing drivers with the 1976 Formula One World Champion, James Hunt (although his spent majority of its time on bricks since he couldn't afford the fuel), Emerson Fittipaldi, Carlos Reutemann and Juan Manual Fangio all owning one. Celebrities also chose them such as Chairman of the Board himself, Frank Sinatra.

As well as *Ronin*, the 450SEL 6.9 had another starring role, Claude Lelouch's brilliant *C'était un Rendez-vous* (*It was a Date*) from 1976, although you'd never know it. An eight-minute, single shot, high speed drive through the centre of Paris during the early hours of a Sunday morning and ending at Montmartre, the car is never seen and the dubbed soundtrack was that of a V12 Ferrari. But its high torque, sharp brakes and self-levelling suspension meant the 450SEL 6.9 was smooth and fast enough for Lelouch to achieve the shots he wanted.

In David Lynch's 1996 film, *Lost Highway*, a 450SEL 6.9 was used as a major plot device, connecting all three main male characters in the film.

Yet it's *Ronin* that the 450SEL 6.9 is arguably best remembered for and I'll admit it was reviewing the film's DVD for a magazine that first introduced me to the model. Having watched it several times since, the sight of Jean Reno's character, Vincent, sliding the big brown saloon around the tight roads above the French Riviera never fails to excite me. But having never driven one, I was worried it would be a disappointment when I finally did.

The 450SEL 6.9 is famous today for its starring role in the 1998 film, *Ronin*, starring Robert De Niro and Jean Reno

Thankfully it wasn't.

The 1979 example shown here is a perfect example of the breed. A genuine right hand drive example, with just one of 702 produced it makes the car a real rarity on these shores.

Like Di Niro's character in Ronin, what I like most about the car is it keeps its firepower quiet; other than the 6.9 boot badge it could easily be just another German saloon of the Seventies and Eighties. However, for those that know, the other distinguishing features that set the 6.9 apart are a crescent-shaped air deflector below the grille, which increases air flow to the engine, wider 215/70 VR 14 tyres (as opposed to 205/70 HR4 of the 450SEL) and larger tailpipes.

Even opening the door doesn't change this much. Although with the dashboard's surfaces are covered in a more realistic wood veneer than the Zebrano found in most other Mercedes saloons of the period, due to the layout being the identical to the lower models including the three big dials directly in front of me it could be an entry 280 I'm sat in rather a top of the range 6.9. As *Autocar* said in 1975, "There is a reassuring familiarity about all Mercedes. Once you are used to the 200, the 6.9 presents no problem. The controls, the instruments, the view are all the same: only the performance is different." But although the 6.9 feels special like all Seventies Mercedes can, unlike the extra opulence of a Vanden Plas over a standard Double Six, despite the initial high purchase

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⇨ price, it goes no further than that.

But while this could have been a disappointment for some, I reckon Mercedes' customers bought for 450SEL 6.9 for its tremendous mechanical speciation rather than the walnut and leather of its rivals. As Professor Hans Scherenberg, a Daimler-Benz AG board member and head of the company's research and development department, said at the car's debut, "As the S-Class' top-of-the-line model and successor of the 300SEL 6.3 with air suspension, the 450SEL 6.9 has the potential to live up to the demands of our most spoiled contemporaries."

Let's see if that's true. The big V8 starts smoothly and easily, sounding surprisingly refined. Rather being the smoky hot rod I was expecting, squealing its tyres at every opportunity, the saloon cruises with the same effortlessness as that Daimler Double Six.

But when I nail the throttle hard, despite weighing the same as a small tank, the big car accelerates with a surprising keenness that's missing from its more relaxed V12-engined British rival. The engine has all the brawn of a genuine muscle car and needs little persuasion to offer its power which arrives the moment I press the throttle, the three-speed automatic gearbox – standard on all 450SEL 6.9s and derived from the standard W116 unit but beefed up to cope with the massive V8's extra torque – dropping down the moment I do so.

Surprisingly for a luxury car with air suspension, the ride feels quite hard at low speeds, with potholes and bumps noticeably transmitted into the cabin. Although never having the floatiness Citroëns with time with hydropneumatic suspension have, this does improve at higher speed. With the suspension keeping the car relatively level at all times and the body roll in check, as Jean Reno showed in Nice, it remains relatively composed on a twisty B-road. Although the steering is assisted, it's not as light as the Daimler's and still offers plenty of feel for both fast firing and parking.

As *Car* magazine said in its June 1975 issue; "A car of such speed and weight must have demonstrably good road holding and handling, and this one is no disappointment in anything from a hairpin to a three-figure-bend."

In an era when cars are becoming more and more lavish, it's genuinely refreshing to drive one as discreet as the 450SEL 6.9 yet knowing it will out-perform and out-luxury anything both of the time or today. It might be famous today for its *Ronin* legacy but this only adds another layer of cool to this already extraordinary vehicle.

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Grand entry

Arriving in 1951, the handsome W186 and W189 saloons set the standards in luxury and refinement all future Mercedes-Benz limousines would follow **WORDS** Andrew Roberts **ARCHIVE IMAGES** Mercedes-Benz

ONLY A select group of cars have a very real sense of presence – ones that have no need to strive to make an impact via excess chrome and/or flamboyant coachwork. The Mercedes-Benz W186 and W189 are prime examples of such vehicles, from the long bonnet to the vague sensation that one really should don a Homburg before taking to the wheel. Furthermore, it is one of the most important models to emerge from Sindelfingen of this century or the last.

When the W186 series 300 made its debut at the Frankfurt Motor Show in April 1951, to say that it impressed the visitors would be a mild understatement.

Yet its origins actually dated back to 1948 when the company's directors considered the manufacture of a new prestige model and the car display was very much in the Fifties idiom. Here was a five seater autobahn transport with a solidly elegant body from Hermann Ahrens mounted on the famed X-shaped steel tube frame derived from the 1939 W153 230 and transmission via four-on-column and an OHC straight six engine. Daimler-Benz first considered using a 2.6 litre plant, but the W189s weight resulted in their trialling a 2.8 litre unit before ultimately opting for 3.0-litre power.

If the fact that the 300 was then the fastest new car made in Germany – with a top speed of over 100 mph – were not sufficiently amazing, there was the all-independent suspension. This was a very unusual feature on a prestige motor car at the

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⇨ time and the set-up of coil springs and double wishbone with an anti-roll car in the front and the famed double coil spring swing axle at the rear gave a ride that insulated the occupants from everyday concern. A switch on the fascia altered the level of the back suspension to cope with differing road conditions. The exceptionally well-heeled owner was offered a choice of hide or fabric upholstery and seven paint finishes while the list of optional extras included a Webasto sunroof and a VHF wireless set.

Full production of the W186 began in November 1951 although a price tag of 19900DM (approximately five times the annual wage) meant that the 300 was unlikely to become an everyday sight. However for Daimler-Benz it was both a symbol of their post-war recovery and an export weapon. At the very same show as its debut, BMW were displaying their new 501 'Baroque Angel', the first V8 German car of its era, but that was smaller, slightly cheaper and of a more overtly sporting nature. The

Munich offering became famed as a police car in its homeland, while the Mercedes-Benz was the choice of film stars and Heads of State who wished for an alternative to a Rolls-Royce, Bentley or Lincoln. For those who craved even more distinction, Mercedes-Benz offered a four-door 300 Cabriolet, which has a fair claim to being one of the finest vehicles of the Fifties.

The most famous 300 user was Dr. Konrad Adenauer, the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany from 1949 to 1963, who was to become so closely with the W186 that it came to be unofficially named after him. He used a total of six 300s and, as the legend goes, he originally selected the Mercedes-Benz after knocking his hat off when entering a BMW 501. The W186 was often employed on formal parade duties; but an owner-driver had the pleasure of owning a formal-looking machine with elegant road manners and an engine that was designed from maximum speed cruising. As an *Autocar* road test of

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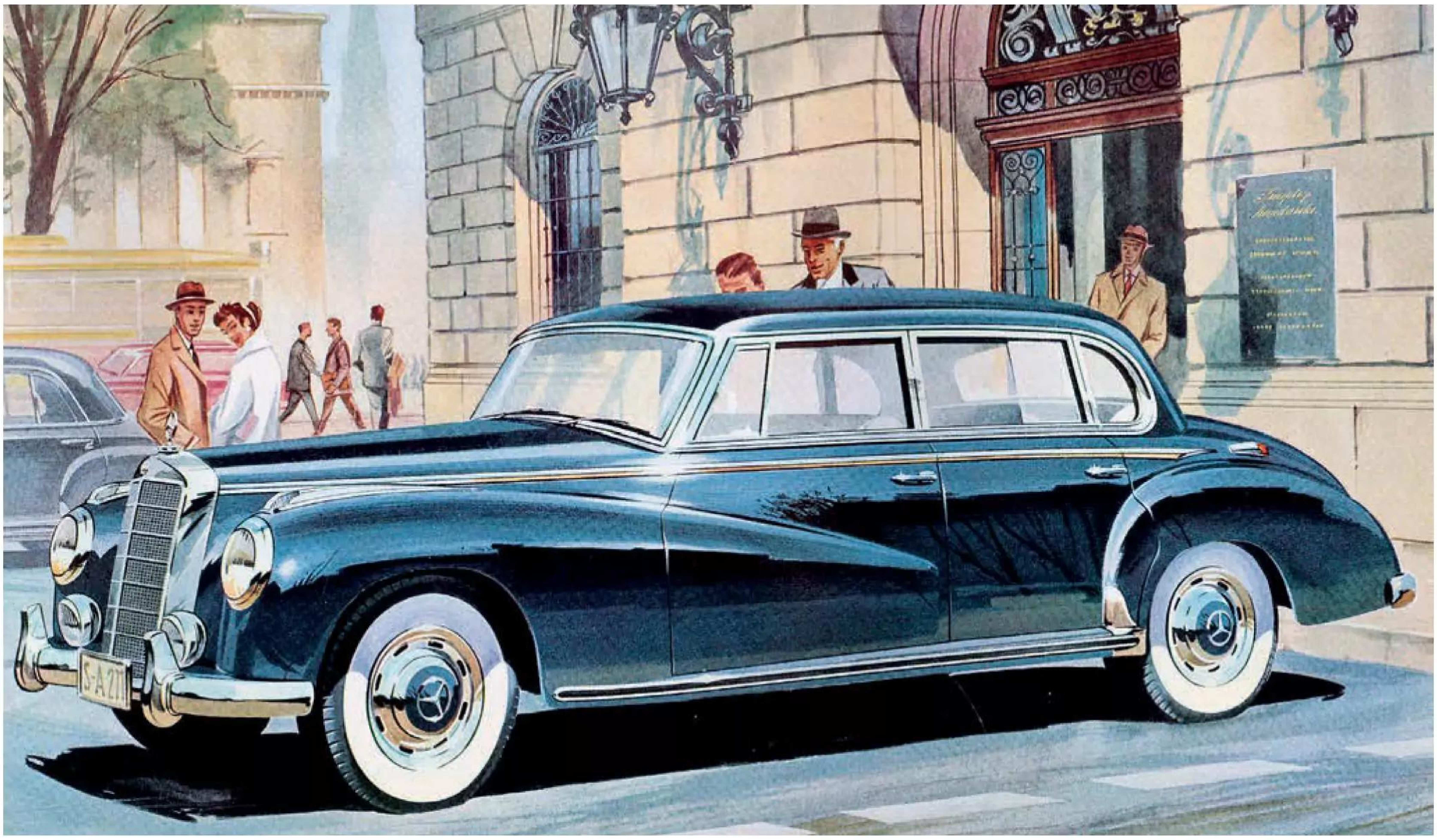
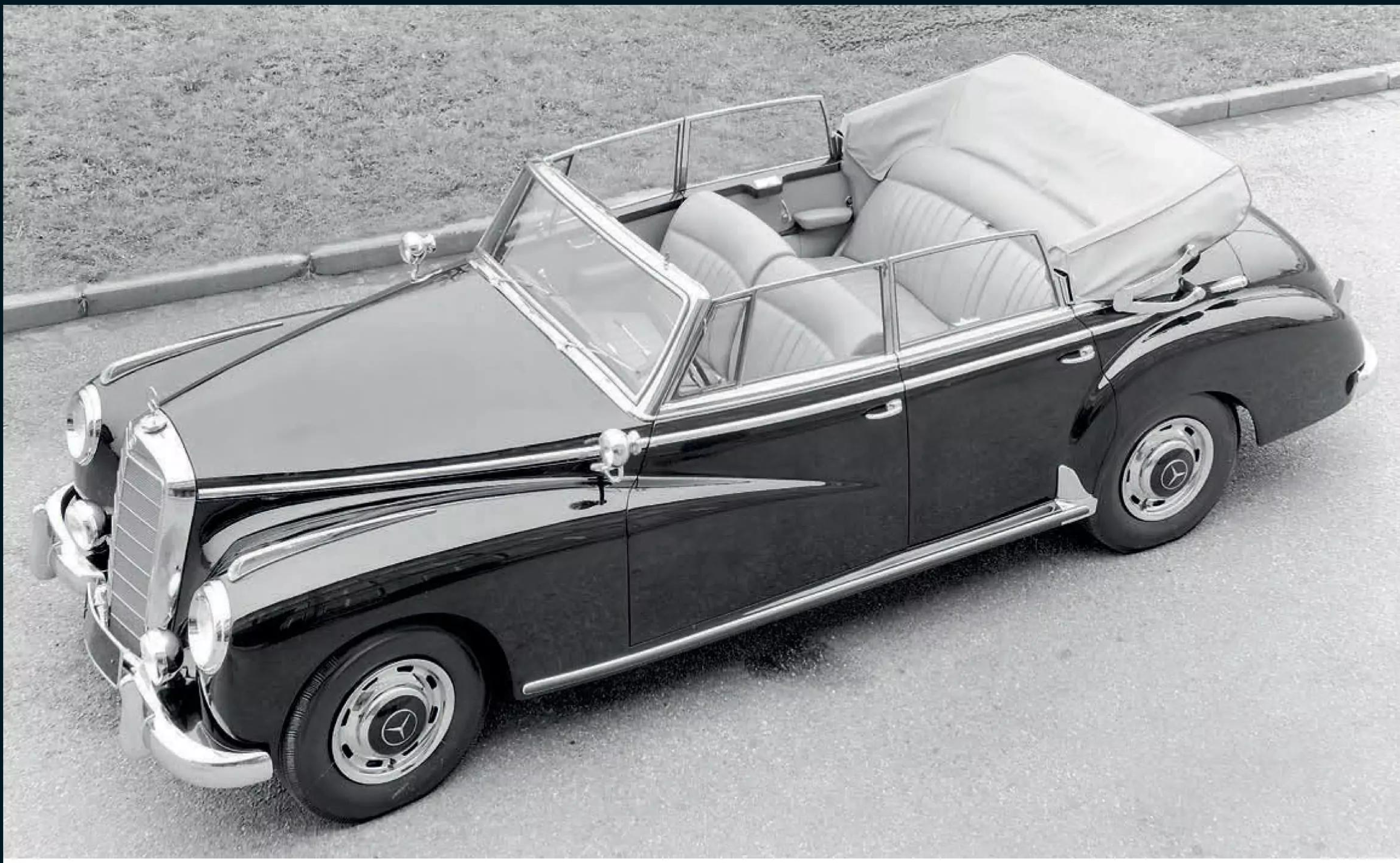




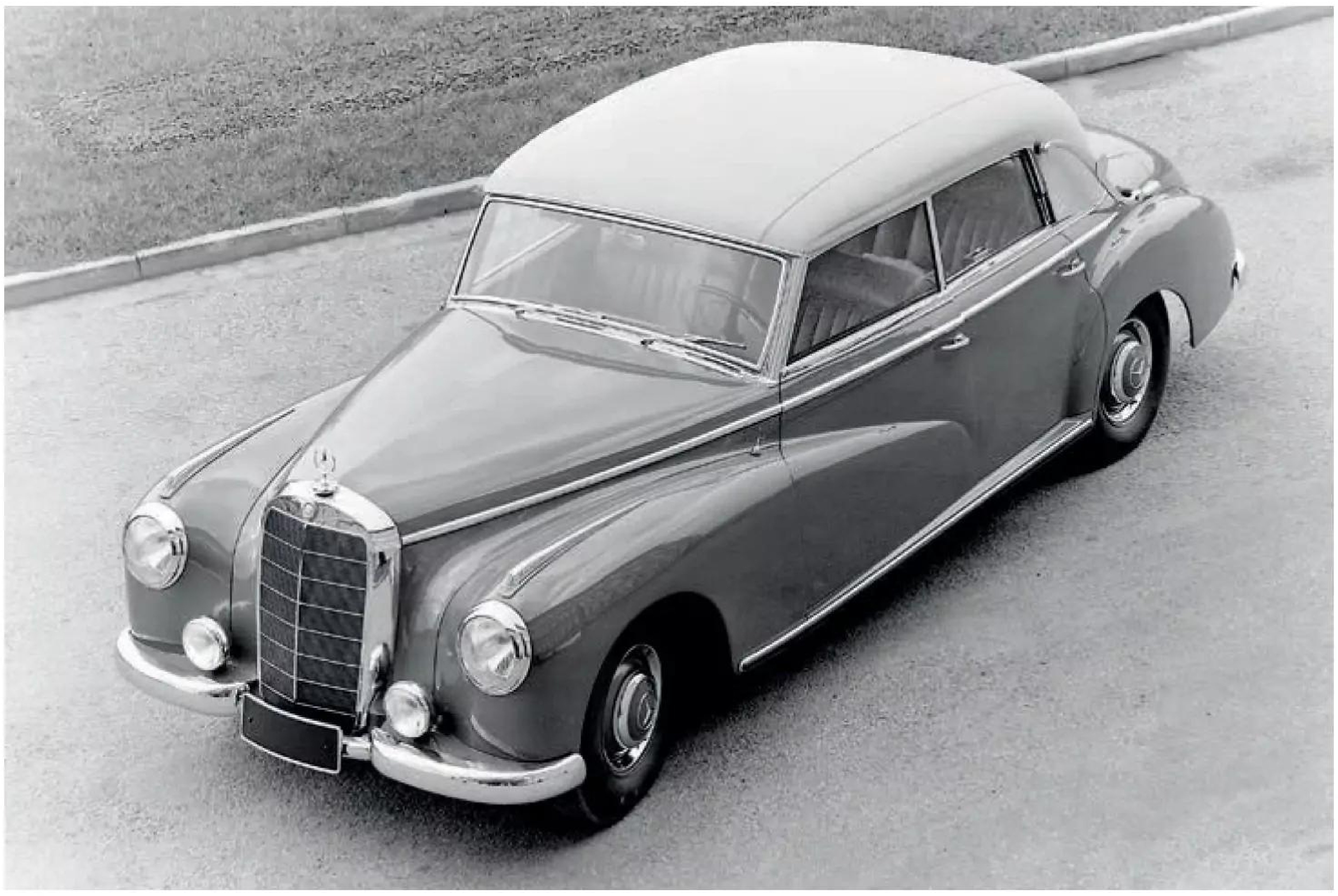
⇨ 1952 observed in its headmasterly fashion:

"To the characteristics of high performance, impressive appearance and fine detail finish which distinguished the big Mercedes models of pre-war days are added new virtues of silence, flexibility and lightness of control, while the latest rear suspension, a product of long experience on Grand Prix cars and touring cars, confers a degree of security at high speeds on rough and slippery surfaces which it would be very difficult indeed to equal."

Of course at this time, any Mercedes-Benz would have been regarded as elite transport in the UK, while to your average Morris Minor or Ford Prefect owner a 300 would have been so exotic as to be almost surreal. One British owner was the famed light comedian Ian Carmichael who recalled in his memoirs; "If few people had seen a Mercedes 300 in the metropolis, nobody had in Hull and Whitby. In August 1957 I returned to Yorkshire something of a celebrity".

By 1952 imports had commenced in the USA, and to own such an "imported automotive" meant that you were the sort of corporate lawyer who could afford to spend over $600 above the price of a Cadillac 75 Fleetwood.

A sliding division was available in early 1953 and in March of the following year Daimler-Benz updated the 300 as the 300b (the earlier model becoming retrospectively known as the 'a'), the W186 gaining a slightly more powerful engine, very welcome power assistance for the brakes and front quarter vents. A year and a half later the 300c had a single-joint swing axle and the option of Borg-Warner three-speed automatic transmission – by now essential for the US luxury car market. 1956 saw the launch of the long-wheelbase version and in August 1957 the W186 was succeeded by the W189 300d and, subjective though such matters are, the latest model managed the almost impossible feat of appearing even more elegant than its predecessor; a pillarless saloon that struck awe in all who encountered it.



Under the bonnet of the 300d, the

3.0-litre engine featured Bosch mechanical direct injection and inside, there was even more legroom for Presidents and international business magnates, plus the option of air conditioning. Of equal interest to a hard-pressed chauffeur was, at last, the chance to persuade your employer to specify power steering for a very heavy motorcar. For an additional 8,000DM the ultra-gracious 300d Cabriolet could be yours, but regardless of which W189 you ordered, it was guaranteed to make an impact; albeit in a gracious manner.

In the USA they were now sold through the Studebaker dealer network, the US firm hoping that former Packard customers would regard a 300d as the famed marque's logical heir.

In 1960 the W189 achieved lasting silver screen stardom when Mr. Laurence Harvey, possibly the most soigné actor in film history, drove an ivory coloured 300d saloon in the Elizabeth Taylor flick, *BUtterfield 8*. With actress winning her first Academy Award for her film, there was no higher cinematic profile at the time.

Production of the 300d ended in March 1962, its heirs being the 300SE/SE LWB 'Fintail' and the 600. A W186 or W189 is a seldom encountered sight at any car show in the UK but in terms of their significance to the Mercedes-Benz legacy they are the equals of the 300SL. The W186 was the first model to automatically associate those three digits with innate motoring quality, which has nothing relating to gimmicky and everything associated with integrity of design. The interior of any surviving Adenauer is not a parody of a pre-war gentleman's club or a mobile jukebox, but a soberly furnished mobile office to convey you to your next appointment with the minimum of delay.

And above all is that ineffable sense of presence, for when an English-language brochure claimed that a 300d was 'the most elegant car in the world for once sales copy was not guilty of hyperbole. To quote *Autocar* one last time; "The Type 300 of Mercedes-Benz is clearly a very strong competitor for the favour of the most discerning international buyers, to whom it will appeal because of its performance, detail finish and equipment. It maintains a high general level of excellence."

We could not have put it better ourselves.

American *express*

Arriving 40 years ago, the 560SL was designed to improve the performance of American exports. Together with a comprehensive specification, they're now considered as one of the most desirable models

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY **PAUL WALTON**

A PROBLEM is a chance for you to do your best," said the famed jazz musician, Duke Ellington, once. This was certainly the case in the mid Eighties when Mercedes-Benz had an issue with American exports of the R107 generation of SL.

Due to the country's restrictive regulations on emissions, in 1980 the 450SL had been replaced by the 380SL. By having less power, the performance of the new model was often criticised and many customers turned to grey imports of the 500SL sourced from Europe.

To resolve this concern, Mercedes-Benz created a brand new model that was not only powered by the largest engine ever fitted to an SL at the time but boasted a comprehensive specification. The resultant 560SL is considered today to show the R107 at its very best.

Never officially sold in the UK, to mark the 40th anniversary of this important model, we've tracked down a rare import. ⇨

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⇨ At the 1985 Frankfurt Motor Show Mercedes-Benz revealed a series of updates for the SL. These included a new design of sleeker looking 15in alloy wheels, larger, ventilated brake discs and four pot calipers, door handles similar to those of the W126 S-Class plus a deep front air dam that helped to reduce front end lift by a third.

Anti-lock braking was now standard while the front suspension geometry was the same as that of the S-Class saloon while at the back was anti squat geometry. Inside there was more veneer, wider seats plus a steering wheel that for the first time incorporated an airbag.

More importantly, there was also a series of new engines that included a 180bhp 3.0-litre six-cylinder (bringing back the SL300 nameplate for the first time since the famed W198 of the Fifties), a 4.2 V8 with 204bhp while the 500SL had a redesigned 5.0 V8 that featured an electronic ignition system plus the Bosch KE-Jetronic electronically controlled mechanical fuel injection system.

The headline act, though, was a 5,547cc version of the latter,

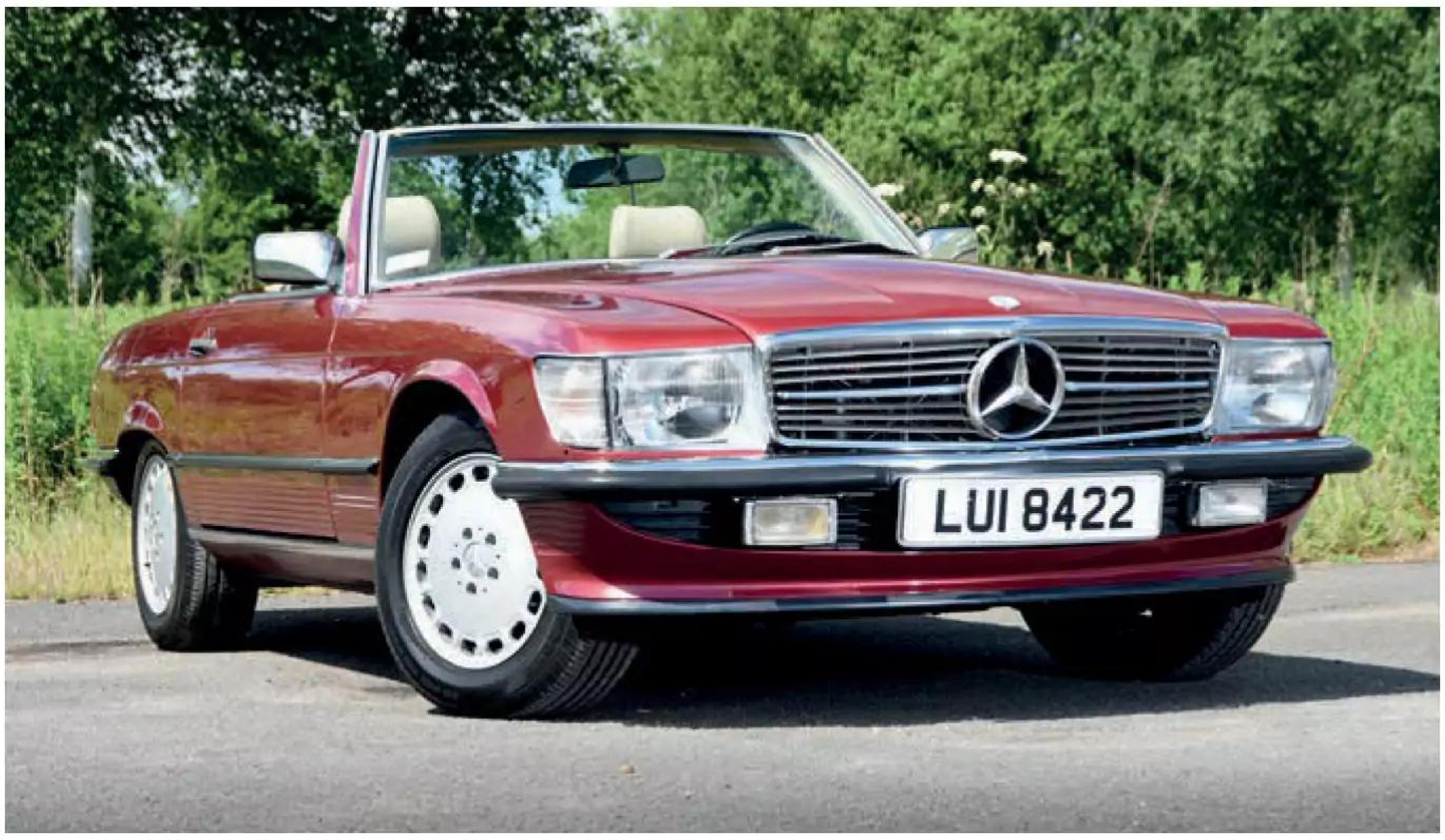
the increase in capacity achieved by expanding the 5.0's stroke by 94.8mm. Primarily aimed at the American market, the 227bhp produced by this new 5.6-litre version was not only a 46 percent increase over the existing 3.8 but close to the 240bhp of the updated 500SL.

This gave the new 560SL a 0-60mph time of 7.7 seconds and a top speed of 139mph, again similar figures to those of the 500SL and a huge improvement over the 380SL. As *Car & Driver* magazine said in its December 1985 issue, "This chink in the SL's otherwise unassailable big-bucks image has been mended with the advent of the new engine."

On top of this, the 560SL came with almost every optional extra fitted as standard including leather upholstery, an alarm system and air conditioning. The only options were electrically heated front seats plus manually operated orthopaedic backrests.

By now it was no secret a new model – the eventual R129 – was on the way, yet this improved performance and improved spec meant the car still drew praise from the critics. "The 560SL can stand on its own four wheels as a high quality, high performance touring car with few current rivals," was *Sports & GT* magazine's view in 1989.

⇨



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Customers clearly thought so too since despite costing $48,600 in 1985 – $12,000 more than a Jaguar XJ-S V12 – the 560SL always sold strongly. Even in 1988, the car's final full year of production, 11,531 were made. "Time has been kind to the SL," continued *Sports & GT Cars*. "It offers performance in the grand manner, there being no substitute for cubic inches when all is said and done, luxurious accommodations for two and timeless good looks."

The 560SL might have only been on sale for four years and was neither cheap nor at 16.5mpg economical, but the 49,347 produced made it the third most popular R107 behind the 450SL (66,928) and 380SL (53,200). Despite the majority heading to the States, a little over 3,000 of the final figure were split between the Australian, Canadian and Japanese markets.

Never officially sold in the UK, due to their heightened desirability a small handful of 560SLs have found their way over here, including this gorgeous metallic red example. First registered in the States on 31 December 1989, with this being four months after production of the R107 had come to an end, it makes the convertible one of the very last examples produced at Mercedes' Sindelfingen plant in West Germany.

The car was imported to the UK in 2011 when it was recommissioned with new European front wings that deleted the large side indicators and then given a full respray. The prominent, energy-absorbing Federal bumpers fitted to every SL since the 1974 model year were replaced with the smaller European versions. With the current owner also swapping the American style of four circular headlights with the European single units the car looks little different from any other late R107 with only the 560SL boot badge separating it from the crowd.

⇨

In my eyes, the R107 remains one of the best looking European sports cars of the Eighties. The model might have been 17 years old when this late example was produced, but it won't have looked as dated as that other great survivor from the Seventies, the Jaguar XJ-S.

One of the reasons it has dated is apart from the post 1985 front air dam which results in a slightly more aggressive appearance than the earlier versions, there are no aerodynamic additions often fitted to the highest performance cars of the era such as the Jaguar XJR-S or Porsche Turbo. Instead there's just the R107's familiar crisp, clean and timeless lines.

As with all R107s, the interior is spacious and well built, the doors shutting with a pleasingly solid thunk often missing from lesser rivals. The dash is simple and pleasingly well laid out although the outside temperature gauge in place of the central air vent that was optional on other SLs and standard on the 560 looks as out of place as a large digital thermometer would on the side of the Houses of Parliament.

Not fast by today's standards, the engine still feels keen, eager, and responsive, needing little persuasion to deliver a surprisingly forceful surge of acceleration. The big engine sounds great too; never loud or overbearing like an American muscle car can be yet the famous V8 double burble becomes ever more evident the harder I squeeze the throttle.

Of course, to meet America's stringent legislation on emissions, the 5.6-litre V8 has been detuned. To get a clearer understanding of what the big unit is capable of, we need to look to the W126 generation of S-Class that had the option of the same engine from 1985. Initially with 296bhp, it allowed the heavy limousine to reach 60mph in a mere seven seconds. "When acceleration is required," confirmed *Autocar* magazine in its 30 July 1986 issue, "the 560SEL really delivers." What this version of the 5.6 could have achieved in the SL is a tantalising thought.

The 560SL was never available with a manual transmission but thankfully the four speed automatic is no slush 'box. The upshifts are both smooth for when cruising and fast enough for more spirited driving. Even better are the downshifts; at anything up to about 65mph, full throttle results in an immediate drop from fourth to second, with the changes taking place at the 6,000rpm.

The 560SL might tip the scales at a portly 1,619kg (3,570lb) – 184kg (406lb) heavier than a Porsche 964 Carrera 2 convertible – but with sharp steering and plenty of grip, the 560SL feels surprisingly agile, remaining composed through bends. Only too much body roll though fast corners blots its otherwise perfect copybook.

It's for all of the reasons listed above why the 560SL is now considered by many as the ultimate R107. Despite being left-hand drive, cars in excellent condition are worth slightly more than a comparable 500SL, up to £70k for a low mileage example.

The SL losing ground in America was clearly a major problem for Mercedes-Benz. Yet the eventual solution really did bring out the best of this always popular and long-lived sports car.

Thanks to: Yorkshire Classic & Sports Cars in Ripon for supplying the 560SL featured (www.ycsc.co.uk)

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DUNLOP
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31
1

Return of the Silver Arrows

Mercedes' success in the World Sportscar Championship throughout the late Eighties and early Nineties was thanks to a Swiss motorsport team. To mark the 40th anniversary of the first Mercedes-powered Sauber, we take a look at the six years the pair dominated the sport

WORDS Paul Walton **ARCHIVE IMAGES** Mercedes Benz

WITH ONE being a quiet and unassuming town on the outskirts of Zurich and the other the industrial capital of Germany, on first glance Hinwil and Stuttgart have as much in common as the Yorkshire Dales do with London. Yet these two very different locations will be forever linked due to a successful racing team.

Proudly Swiss, Sauber has been based in Hinwil since its inception over five decades ago. After joining forces with Mercedes-Benz in 1985 for the World Sportscar Championship, the pair went on to enjoy a famously successful partnership meaning this quiet area of Switzerland remains as much a part of Mercedes' racing history as its own home.

To mark the 40th anniversary of Sauber's first Mercedes-Benz powered sportscar, we're looking at the six years the pair dominated the World Sportscar Championship.

Peter Sauber originally trained as an electrician and worked for his family's traffic light business based in both Zurich and Hinwil 20 miles to the southeast. But with no interest in the industry, he later became a car dealer, selling British Leyland and Subaru models in Hinwil.

In 1967 when Sauber owned a Volkswagen Beetle, a friend convinced him to have it tuned. A few months later he entered the now very fast car into a handful of hill climbs, sparking a life-long interest in developing racing cars.

Wanting to take motorsport more seriously, in 1970 he designed and built his first purpose-built racing car in his parent's garage. Featuring a tubular space frame with double triangular wishbones it was powered by a 997cc four-cylinder Cosworth engine. Named the C1 after Sauber's wife Christine (a nomenclature that continued for 55 years) Sauber won the 1970 Swiss Sports Car Championship. "The C1 was much better than the cars it was racing against," he explained during a 2022 interview. "I certainly wasn't a particularly talented driver."

This success led him to becoming a full time racing car constructor, PP Sauber AG, hanging up his helmet in 1974. Between 1971 and 1978 Sauber built another 13 cars which enjoyed various levels of success.

Still very much a Swiss team, Sauber originally had no plans to race internationally. "It was never our goal to win the sports car World Championship or Le Mans," he explained in 2004, "it was just to do something in Switzerland, maybe cross the border to Germany occasionally."

It was with the BMW-powered C5 which the Swiss driver, Herbert Muller, won the 1976 Interserie Championship with that Sauber started to achieve a wider prominence. "We won that after racing in Belgium, France, and Germany using BMW engines, and then we did Le Mans with the car. Slowly we progressed, step by step."

For Sauber's 1977 Le Mans entry, the C5 was driven by an all-Swiss pairing of Eugen Strähl and Peter Barnhard. Despite running as high as second in class and tenth overall, the car retired due to a broken gearbox. The team returned the following year but again never finished.

Despite Sauber's achievements, building and selling racing cars in Switzerland wasn't financially viable. In 1978 he started preparing Lolas for the Swiss Formula 3 Championship and 1979 his three drivers finished first, second and fourth. One of these, Max Welti, would later become Sauber's first and long-standing team manager.

Sauber also entered a BMW M1 in the 1979 Procar Championship, developing another for GS Racing's entry of the 1980 World Sportscar Championship. With Hans Stuck and future F1 champion, Nelson Piquet, at the wheel, the car won the Nürburging 1000km.

The Swiss outfit returned to building its own cars in 1982 with the SHS C6 that was designed to the new Group C rules which had been adopted by that year's World Endurance Championship. The aluminium monocoque chassis and was made by Swiss engineering firm, Seger and Hoffman (hence the SHS designation), and powered by a Ford Cosworth 3.9-litre V8. It was the first Sauber to be analysed in a wind tunnel and it was during these

⇨

Peter Sauber with the Mercedes-powered Sauber C8 at Hockenheim during testing in 1985

The now Kouros sponsored C8 finished second at the 1986 1000km of Silverstone with Mike Thackwell and Henri Pescarolo at the wheel

At the 1988 1000km of Silverstone, Jean Louis Schlesser and Jochen Mass finished second in the Sauber C9

tests that Peter met a BMW engineer, Leo Ress, who would complete the calculations for the suspension geometry using the manufacturer's computer power.

Relatively slow and unreliable, the two cars entered in the 1982 WEC rarely finished with fourth place at the Hockenheimring being the sole highlight.

Wanting more power for his next car, the C7, Sauber chose a BMW 3.5-litre while the body was now designed by Ress. Faster and more reliable than its predecessor, at the 1983 24 Hours of Le Mans the sole example ran well enough to finish ninth, the sole non-Porsche in the top ten.

The car's other race that year was Fuji when it finished tenth. But busy developing its replacement, Sauber took a year-long sabbatical from racing selling the lone C7 to an American outfit who raced in the IMSA GT Championship.

Once again the work of Leo Ress (who had joined Sauber as technical director in 1985), as with its predecessor, the C8 also featured an aluminium monocoque chassis. During the car's development, Peter Sauber approached the University of Stuttgart about using its wind tunnel. Due to the university working with Porsche it wasn't in a position to help but a professor suggested Sauber contact Mercedes instead.

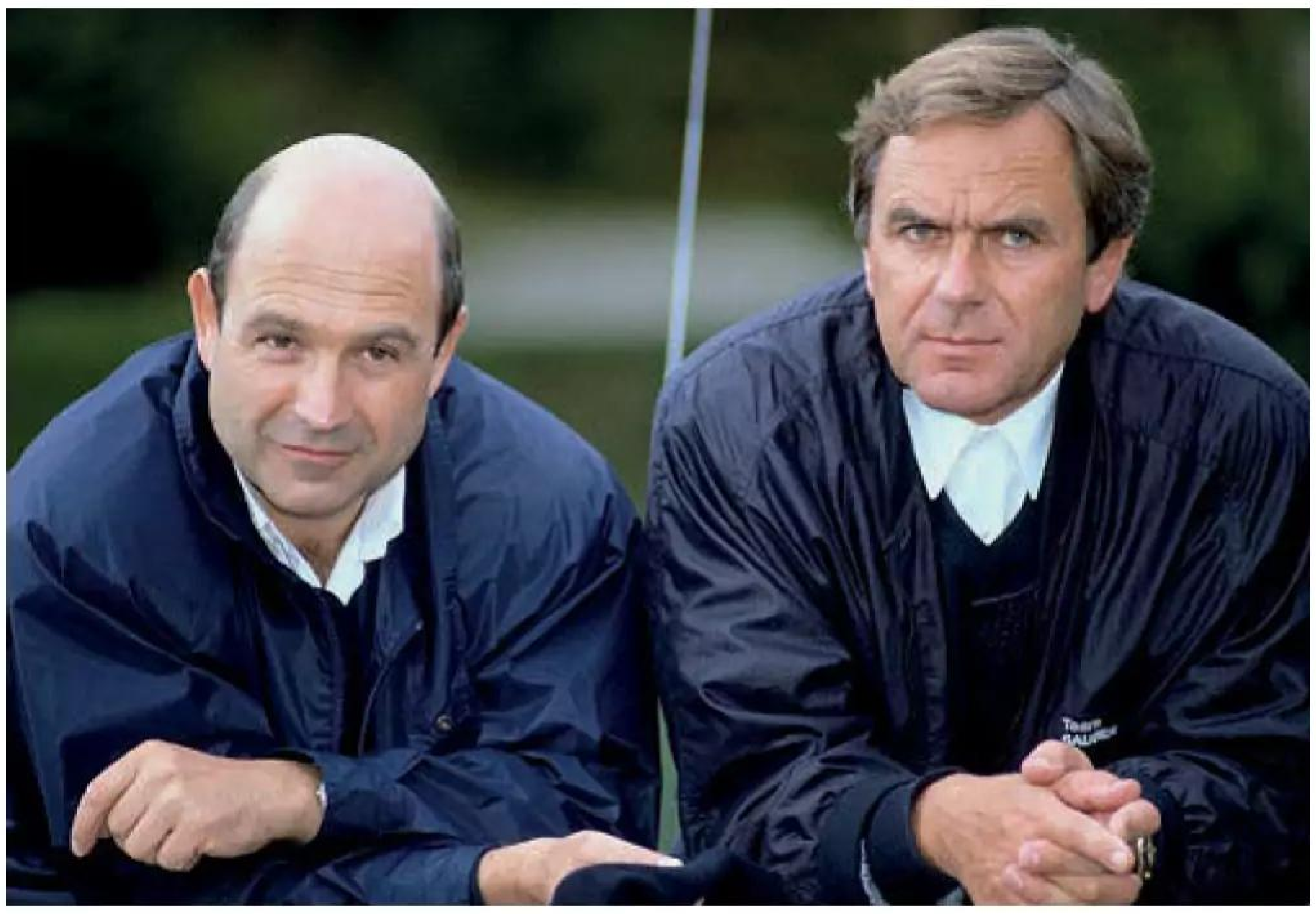
Not only did the company agree but Sauber also asked whether his new car would use the company's M117 5.0-litre V8 turbo. Although the answer was yes, it wouldn't be an official venture.

"It started off as an under-the-table co-operation," explained Sauber's then team manager (and former driver) Max Welti during a 2010 interview. "Peter had connections with some ambitious Mercedes research and development engineers who were willing to do something with him. I have to say, they didn't take a lot of convincing."

Despite where the partnership would eventually lead too, Sauber's links with Mercedes-Benz were initially very low key. "It was a very delicate matter to start with," Sauber explained in 2022. "Motor sport was still a taboo subject at Mercedes back then, with the serious accident at Le Mans in 1955 still weighing heavily. So a dedicated group of Mercedes engineers helped us out in their free time." He went on to explain he never even had a contract; just handshake deal with the chairman of the Daimler-Benz board, Professor Werner Niefer. "That was worth more than any piece of paper with signatures scrawled on it."

Officially the engines were prepared by a German born tuning specialist based in Switzerland, Heini Mader, but Welti reckoned Mercedes-Benz was involved from the start. "Maybe Mader built up one or two engines, but no more." He suggested

Peter Sauber waves after the team of Jochen Mass, Manuel Reuter and Stanley Dickens had won the 1989 24 Hours of Le Mans



Peter Sauber (left) and Sauber's sporting director, Jochen Neerpasch in 1989

they were instead built at Mercedes' huge powertrain facility outside Stuttgart in Untertürkheim. Mildly blown through twin KKK turbochargers, the 5.0 V8 produced 700bhp, making the C8 fast from the outset.

Making its debut at the 1985 24 Hours of Le Mans, the sole entry took flight during practice with John Neilson driving, almost completing an entire loop before landing on its wheels 280m further down the track with driver thankfully unhurt. Although repairable, the car was withdrawn from the race, the team later discovering a loose undertray caused the accident.

Sauber returned the following year, this time with sponsorship from cosmetics company, Kouros, enabling a five race campaign. Although not in the same league as the highly successful Porsche 962 or Jaguar XJR-6, the C8 was still a reliable and fast package with Mike Thackwell and Henri Pescarolo winning the rain-hit Nürburgring 1000kms. Admittedly the main competitors had all retired, but it was a promising finish for what was still a tiny team.

"Though the results reveal that Porsche and Jaguar lost all their cars it wasn't a hollow victory," read *Motorsport* magazine's report in its October 1986 issue, "for in dreadful weather conditions Thackwell had commanded the race."

For 1987 the C8 was redesigned by Ress resulting in the C9. The monocoque was now reinforced by bonded aluminium panels, the ground effects improved and a front-mounted water radiator added. The rear suspension featured coil spring/damper units mounted horizontally along the top engine support crash tubes.

Although prone to gearbox issues, retiring from four of the five races entered, the sole car occasionally showed promise. At Le Mans Johnny Dumfries established the track record for the revised layout while Mike Thackwell took both pole and the fastest lap of the 1000km of Spa. "Those Merc sports cars were so quick, loads of grip, great to drive," confirmed the British driver in the April 2012 issue of *Motorsport*.

Sadly the Kouros sponsorship – which was never enough to transform the car into a serious contender anyway – came to an end after Spa and with it Sauber's aspirations for the big time.

Thankfully the team was saved when it was announced in December Mercedes' involvement in the team would increase, channelling both financial and technical support into Sauber's operation.

"We saw the potential of our V8 engine last year," explained Niefer, who had personally championed giving the Swiss team further help. "This year we not only want to put it to the test in tough racing competition, but also want to know the challenges and opportunities in this specialised discipline, which is of great technical interest."

Mercedes helped Sauber to develop the

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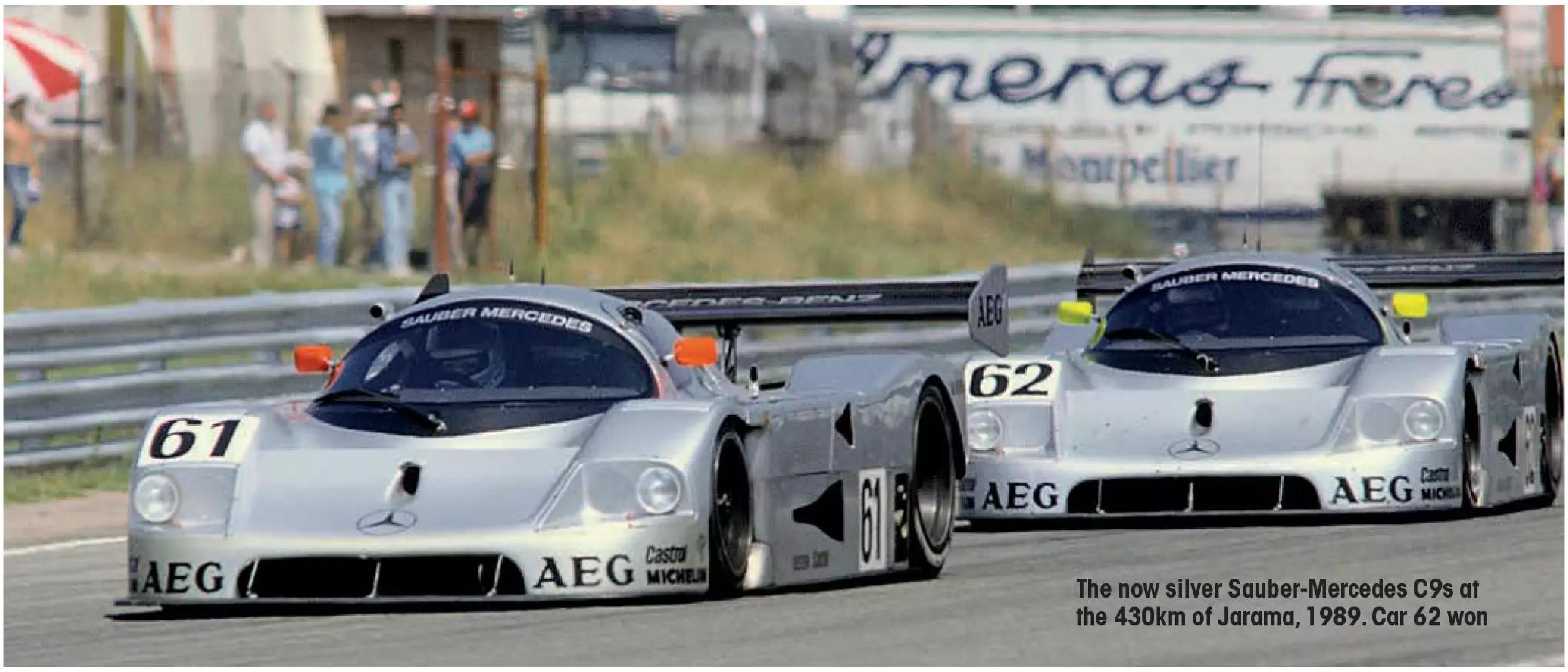

The now silver Sauber-Mercedes C9s at the 430km of Jarama, 1989. Car 62 won

SAUBER MERCEDES
63
62
AEG
Castrol

Sauber dominated the 1989 24 Hours of Le Mans, finishing first and second

⇨ problematic Hewland VGC gearbox using components from Staffs Silent Gears in the UK. Four factory technicians would also attend each race to support Sauber's mechanics to look after the engines.

Sponsorship came from one of Daimler-Benz's subsidiaries, AEG-Olympia, said to be worth five million Deutschmarks. "With the level of commitment now shown," said *Motorsport* in its May 1988 issue, "it is impossible to imagine that Peter Sauber's team aims to go anywhere but forwards – to victory at Le Mans and the World Championship."

Initially just a single C9 was entered into the 1988 championship, driven by sportscar legends Jean-Louis Schlesser, Jochen Mass and Mauro Baldi. Looking resplendent in its new dark blue livery, it now featured discreet Powered by Mercedes-Benz stickers on the engine cover marking the German company's official support.

Despite the three drivers making bets on when the gearbox would fail during the first race of the season at Jerez, the C9 proved to be surprisingly reliable on a day when the Jaguars weren't. Fast from the outset with Jean-Louis Schlesser taking pole, the team won with relative ease, putting down a marker for the team's future intentions. "It was a significant victory for Peter Sauber's team," was *Motorsport's* view in its April 1988 issue.

Apart from Le Mans when the team withdrew due to a high speed tyre blow out in practice, it would highly successfully season for Sauber. Schlesser and Mass would win Brno, Nürburgring and Sandown Park while Baldi and Stefan Johansson in a second car (that had arrived at Silverstone in May) took Spa-Francorchamps.

Schlesser could have won the driver's championship at the Belgian race if it wasn't for a fractured right-rear top suspension link that needed four laps to repair dropping him and teammate Mass down to third. With Martin Brundle's Jaguar finishing second it was enough for British driver the take the 1988 driver's crown. But as Sauber's best season to date, it showed what this still tiny Swiss team was now capable of. "Jaguar is the top team," said *Motorsport* in its November 1988 issue, "but the pressure from Switzerland is not going to lessen next season."

Its perhaps due to this success why at Mercedes' traditional end of season party when Neifer was sitting with the Sauber management he decided the cars would run in the colours of Mercedes subsidiary, AEG, for 1989. This meant the return of the Silver Arrows for the first time since 1955 when the German company had pulled out of all motorsport in the wake of the dreadful Le Mans accident. "We were all drunk, pretty drunk actually," explained Sauber's team manager, Max Welti. "Niefer had these big hands and he banged his big fist down on the table and said that we were going to race silver cars. The beer glasses literally sprang up in the air. It was all done by him, Mr Niefer. It was his decision and his decision alone."

By now Sauber was no longer the tiny Swiss team it had once been. Thanks to the money flowing in from Stuttgart, it had quickly morphed into a large, fully-staff and well-organised outfit that in 1988 had moved into a new and substantial Hinwil workshop. "Everything was less rushed and we were properly organised," remembered Leo Ress in *Motorsport*. "We had more time to focus on car development, the aerodynamics and car set-up. In 1988, we had been struggling just to get to the races."

Although the team's entry was still under Sauber's name, Niefer had been right to make it appear more like it was a Mercedes outfit since the now silver cars dominated the 1989 season, winning all but one race.

The seven victories from eight races were more than enough for Sauber to secure the team championship and Jean-Louis Schlesser the driver's. Considering just two years earlier the team wasn't even competing a full season it was an incredible achievement.

Although not part of the championship, the team also won Le Mans. With last year's winners, Jaguar, fading due to unreliability, the Silver Arrows dominated the 24-hour race, claiming Mercedes victory in 37 years. "I don't think we can ever do better than that," said the company's competitions manager, Jochen Neerpasch, after three cars had crossed the line in formation to claim first, second and fifth places.

For 1990 Leo Ress designed a brand new car, the C11. Whereas its predecessor had been made from aluminium, this was constructed from carbon fibre. It also used a new four-valve version of the Mercedes V8 known as the M119 which produced around 720bhp. It was then joined a new Mercedes five-speed transmission designed by Sigurd Heinmuller, a former Porsche transmission specialist.

The C11 was both stiffer and lighter than the C9, allowing further ballast to be placed strategically to bring the weight up to the required 900kg. The Brembo brakes were the same as before as was the front suspension design of transverse, inboard coil spring/dampers and pushrod operation. But at the rear a similar transverse system as the front replaced the predecessor's longitudinal damper layout.

The C11 was supposed to make its debut at the season opener at Suzuka but Schlesser damaged the only example in practice meaning the team resorted to the C9. Yet the old car still showed its class when Schlesser and Baldi crossed the line first. The new model finally made its competition debut at the next race at Monza in April which it also won. With the C11 being fast, reliable and consistence, the Swiss team again took all but one race leading to Schlesser retaining his crown.

"The C11 was the first car after I left Formula 1 that was really enjoyable to drive," explained Baldi in the January 2010 issue of *Motorsport*. "It gave you the same feeling as an F1 car. You could really drive that car, even though it was a heavy sports car. It was such an honest car: you could feel what was going to happen next, if you were going to lose the front or if you were going to lose the rear."

The only blot on an otherwise flawless copybook was Silverstone when the leading car of Schlesser and Baldi suffered a rare engine failure when they had a lead of 50 seconds after just 40 laps. Plus since Le Mans still wasn't part of the World Sportscar Championship, Sauber prioritised the races that were and didn't try to claim back-to-back victories.

SPORTSCAR
WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP
AUTOPOLIS
GOODYEAR
Castrol
Michael Schumacher (left) and Karl Wendlinger after winning the 430km of Autopolis in Japan with a C291 in 1991

The other big news that year was the introduction of a junior team consisting of three German Formula 3 hotshots including Heinz-Harald Frentzen, Michael Schumacher and Karl Wendlinger. Thanks to their speed and maturity, the trio impressed the team with Wendlnger and Schumacher taking a victory each. From the outset, the latter showed the natural ability that would make him one of the world's most successful drivers.

"Frentzen was the easiest; he just jumped in and drove," said the youngsters' tutor and co-driver, Jochen Mass, in the January 2010 issue of *Motorsport*. "Wendlinger could be very quick on a single lap. But Michael was easily the most focused, the most analytical."

In 1991 Ress designed another all-new car, the C291, which conformed to the championship's new 3.5-litre regulations. "The engine research took two months and involved 15 concepts," said Mercedes' technical director for its WSCC programme, Dr Hermann Hiereth, in a 1991 interview. "Some were conventional and some were very advanced."

What Hiereth's team designed was an unusual flat 12-cylinder engine, M291, while to reduce torsional vibrations, drive to the gearbox was taken from the central point of the crankshaft. To make more room for the underfloor venturi tunnels, the transverse six-speed gearbox was then positioned higher up.

Like the C11, the C291 had a full carbon

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The 1989 Le Mans winning C9 of Mass, Reuter and Dickens

AEG
MICHELIN
MERCEDES-BENZ
63
BILSTEIN Castrol
Castrol
MICHELIN

Leading the pack at Suzuka, 1989

Side-by-side with Sauber's main rival, the Jaguar XJR-9, at Jarama, 1989

The winning C9 of Schlesser and Baldi at Suzuka, 1990

fibre reinforced plastic monocoque, made even stronger with a roll-over bar incorporated into the roof.

As a brand new car ("Only the wheel bearings have been taken from the C11," said Dr Hiereth) the team suffered from number of problems during winter testing. The most significant of these was the push-pull gearshift operation that replaced the traditional H-gate.

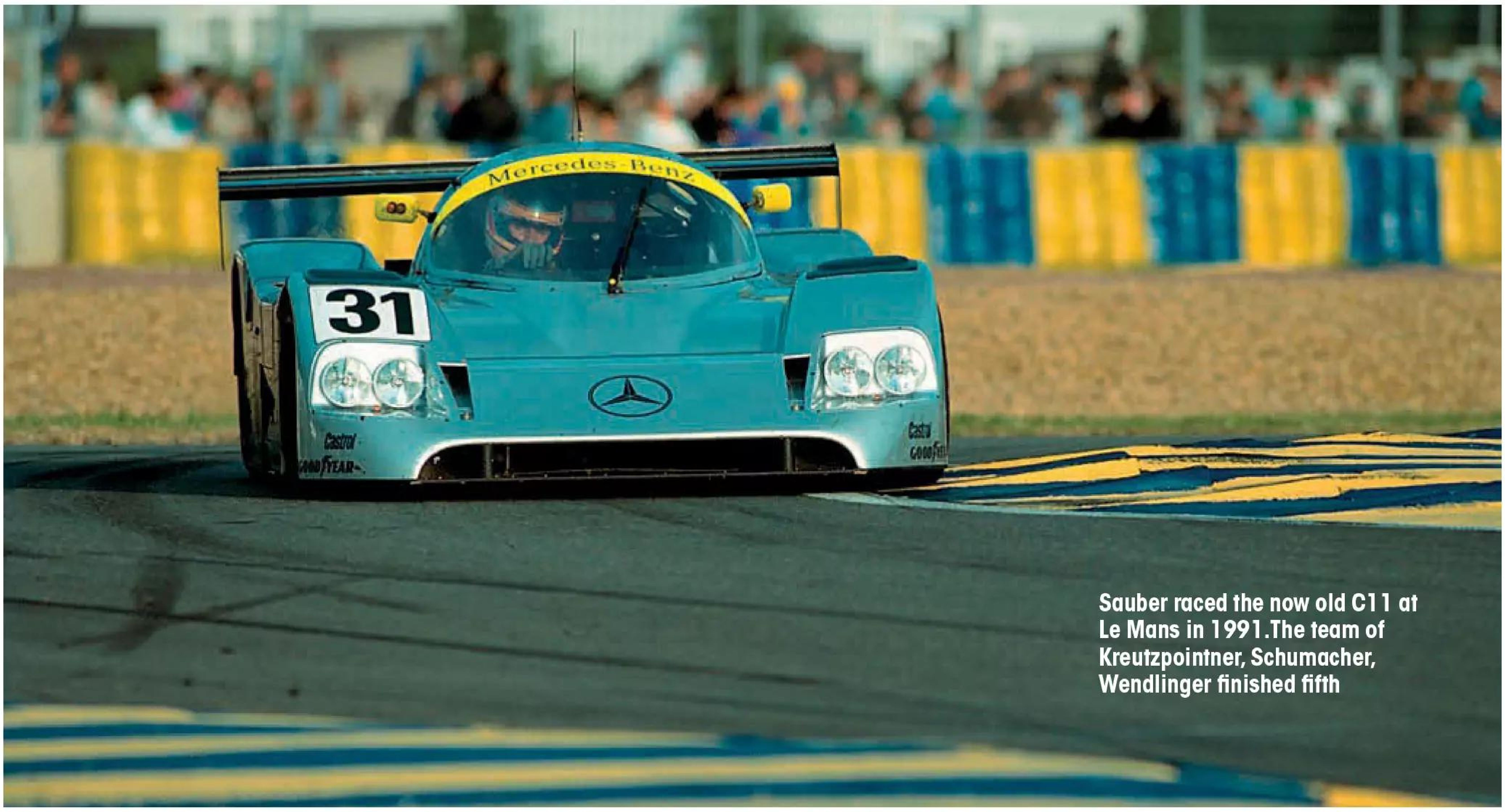
It was clear at the first race of the 1991 season at Suzuka in April that the C291 was off the pace compared to the Jaguar XJR-14 and Peugeot 905. "To be honest, we just ran out of time with the new car," admitted Neerpasch. "The C291 is a very good car, with very good potential, but we don't have it totally under control. If it was reliable now it would easily beat the C11."

Since the new rules allowed the old turbo cars to compete but at a 1,000kg limit, 100kg more than the 3.5-litre machines, Schlesser and Mass initially used the C11 while the C291 was entrusted to Schumacher and Wendlinger. With the season dominated by eventual winners Jaguar plus Peugeot Sauber-Mercedes often finished off the podium.

For Le Mans, the team entered a pair of C11s. "There was no point going with the C291," explained Ress in 2010. "The chances of finishing would have been very small." After taking the lead at the sixth hour, the car of Jean Louis Schlesser, Jochen Mass and Alain Ferté was heading for certain victory. But late on the Sunday afternoon the alternator support bracket fractured just as Ferté was passing the pits. Since the same pulley drove both the alternator and the water pump, the V8 was cooked by the time the Frenchman made it back to the pits. It was later discovered for the first the bracket had been anodised which had made it very brittle. "We are all still frustrated by that race," continued Ress in 2010. "I have to say, it is the biggest disappointment of my life."

As for the WSCC, a flawed batch of flat 12 cylinder blocks got into the system and their dangerously thin walls prompted a sequence of frustrating engine failures throughout the second half of the season.

Thankfully the year ended on a high when Schumacher and Wendlinger took Sauber's sole victory of the championship at the final race in Japan with Schlesser and Mass finishing fifth in a second



Sauber raced the now old C11 at Le Mans in 1991.The team of Kreutzpointner, Schumacher, Wendlinger finished fifth

Karl Wendlinger testing Sauber's first F1 car, the C13, at Barcelona in early 1994

C291. "Miracles do happen sometimes," said *Motorsport's* review of the race in the December 1991 issue, "and the reliability of the two race engines in the Mercedes was one of them."

Yet the result wasn't enough to stop Sauber from finishing a distant third in the team's championship while Mass/Schlesser and Schumacher/Wendlinger were sixth and seventh respectively.

Although Sauber had been developing a new car, the C292, for the following season, it had been rumoured for some time that Mercedes-Benz was considering pulling out of sportscar racing in preparation for an assault on Formula 1 with Sauber. The German giant had even hired former Ferrari and Tyrrell designer, Harvey Postlethwaite, to oversee its return to Grand Prix racing from Sauber's Hinwil facility.

So its announcement on November 26, 1991, took everyone by surprise since not only was it pulling out of sportscar racing but neither was it entering F1. The company's sole motorsport effort would be supporting privateer touring car teams.

"We do not see a future for Mercedes-Benz in Group C and we do not want to become involved in Formula 1," said Neifer. "The company will withdraw completely from top-class motor racing and will be represented in near standard touring car racing, by providing support to private teams." He went on to explain that Mercedes was not afraid of the technical challenge of Formula 1, citing "risks in social and ecological spheres," as way of an explanation.

Unbowed, Sauber decided to enter F1 anyway, making the grid in 1993. "After the successful years in the sports car world championship it was only a small step into the Formula 1," explained Sauber years later.

But when the pair of C12s appeared at the first race of the season in South Africa driven by Karl Wendlinger and JJ Lehto, their all black livery was broken by subtle 'Concept by Mercedes-Benz' stickers on the engine cover. The German company might not have committed to F1 but neither had it totally turned its back on its racing partner.

Although it became fully involved from 1994 onwards, rebadging the Ilmor-built V8s as Mercedes-Benz, the pair never achieved the same heights they did in sportscars. In 1995 the German company defected to McLaren, a move that would eventually culminate in three driver's and one constructor's championships. After buying the Brawn team in late 2009 it became highly successful manufacturer in its own right, dominating the sport throughout the 2010s. As for Mercedes' former sportscar partner, following 32 largely unsuccessful seasons it has been bought by Audi and 2025 will be final season of the Sauber name in F1.

Yet no matter the changes, the team is remaining in Hinwil. This quiet and unassuming town might even further away from Audi's home of Ingolstadt than it is from Stuttgart but as the late Eighties and early nineties showed, it knows how to build winners.

Executive decision

WORDS Sam Skelton **PHOTOGRAPHY** Paul Walton

If you were an executive in the late Sixties, there was only two choices of car – the spartan Mercedes-Benz W114 or the prestigious Jaguar XJ6. With both cars worth similar values today, how do the 2.8-litre of both compare now?

WHETHER WE want to admit it or not, a lot of us buy our cars based upon the image they project. We want to be seen as special, separate, exclusive – and this is why sales of the BMW 3-Series began to routinely outstrip those of the Ford Mondeo around the turn of the millennium. Jaguar drivers aren't immune either – we might admire the engineering of our chosen cars, but at least some of the decision – whether now or with their first Jaguars – will have been based upon what the car says about its driver.

And Jaguar's image in the early Seventies was stronger than it had been in a decade. The associations with London criminal types had been shaken off, the range was nearly new in its entirety, and there was an air of quiet respectability to an XJ6 that was lacking in the older Mk 2-based models, and in the giant 420G. Few marques could touch Jaguar in terms of what they said about you. For the £2,617 that an XJ6 2.8 automatic cost in 1971, a Citroen DS23 Pallas would have marked you as eccentric, a Volvo 164 would have marked you as dull, and a Rover P5B would have marked you as old-fashioned. If you wanted to tell the world you had really made it, the Mercedes-Benz 250 offered a similar-sized engine and car to the Jaguar – but cost almost 20 percent more. That put the Mercedes firmly in the 'company director' salary bracket – but was it really a better car than the Jaguar? And moreover, could it justify the hefty increase in price?

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1973 Mercedes 250 (W114)
Specifications

Engine	2,778cc straight-six
Power	128bhp
Torque	159lb ft
0-60mph	12.4secs
Top speed	109mph
Economy	24mpg
Transmission	4-spd auto
Price new	£3,125
Value now	£5k-£15k

⇨ Mercedes-Benz launched its W114/W115 series in 1968 – mid-sized saloon cars in what we would now consider to be the E-Class family. Styled by French car designer, Paul Bracq, they pioneered a new suspension system for the company utilising semi-trailing rear arms and a ball-joint front end, which would see service under the next-generation S-Class and under the SL which would remain in production until the end of the Eighties.

The W115 was the economy model; typically four-cylinder and less well equipped, while the W114 was the prestigious six-cylinder model. Known when new as the '/8' models – derived from a similar marking on their chassis plates denoting their 1968 introduction – the 'Stroke 8' saloons earned a reputation for solidity, reliability and good engineering. The W114 models ranged from the 230.6 (to differentiate from the four-cylinder 230.4) through to the fuel-injected 280E. Mercedes offered a saloon, while there were pillarless coupe variants known as the 250C/CE and 280C/CE.

Mercedes facelifted the W114 for 1973, with a lower bonnet, wider grille, revised bumpers, and removal of the quarter windows to the front doors. There were also new taillights, inertia-reel belts, and a revised A-pillar design intended to help keep the side windows clear. A new padded steering wheel completed the updates. For 1976 Mercedes-Benz launched a new mid-sized saloon range, the W123 – looking and feeling like an evolution of its predecessor, this car would carry the Mercedes-Benz range into the Eighties.

Like the Mercedes, Jaguar launched the XJ6 in 1968. It was an effort to rationalise what was a somewhat complex range of saloon models – the 240 and 340, the 3.4 and 3.8 S-types, the 420, and the 420G – six models which could be rationalised into a single range of two models. Jaguar had intended a new 3.0 six and a V12 for the car, but neither engine was ready – instead, the XK unit was fitted in 2.8- and 4.2-litre guises, and the V12 would follow for 1972. The car had been styled by company founder,

1971 Jaguar XJ6 2.8 automatic

Specifications

Engine	2,792cc straight-six
Power	147bhp
Torque	182lb ft
0-60mph	10.5secs
Top speed	114mph
Economy	22mpg
Transmission	3-spd auto
Price new	£2,617
Value now	£2k-£9k

(Sir) William Lyons, in a process which evolved from what had begun as a four-door E-type and would eventually resemble a modernised 420. While the reduction to a single-model range did leave buyers of some of the company's cheaper models without a natural replacement the XJ6 was an instant hit – more so when the Daimler V8-250 and Daimler Sovereign had been replaced by the XJ6-derived Sovereign 2.8 and Sovereign 4.2 accordingly. The launch of the V12s in 1971 meant that Jaguar could reasonably lay claim to the title of best car in the world, and many thought that the Rolls-Royce Silver Shadow might lose the crown – especially when long-wheelbase variants and a new range-topping Daimler Double-Six Vanden Plas were added to the XJ range for 1972.

The Series 1 XJ was replaced in 1973 with the Series 2, which from 1974 would only be produced in long wheelbase and new coupe forms – but the 'Series' XJ6 would continue in the same basic form until the end of Series 3 production in 1986. The XJ6 was replaced by the new XJ6 – developed as the XJ40, with new engines and an all-new body. Even then, the V12 would continue for a further six years.

Two cars with similar sales periods, similarly-sized engines and price tags appealing to the similarly wealthy, then – the Jaguar appealed to those who wanted something flash that drove well, while the Mercedes appealed to the more subtle customer who prized quality over driver satisfaction. And while the Jaguar's larger 4.2- and V12-engined variants might have been closer to the Mercedes on price, it's the 2.8 we feel makes the most interesting comparison today as it represents the closest rivalry between the two companies in the early Seventies. Which of the two would have made a better buy when new? And which makes for a better classic today?

You can see a clear evolution from Mk 2 to 420 to XJ6 if you look but viewed on the face of it there was a sea change between the Jaguars of the Sixties and the XJ range which would eventually replace them. The one thing the XJ kept was the sense

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⇨ of animal aggression; it may have been a squarer shape but there was still energy in the haunches over the rear wheels, the hoods over the headlamps reminiscent of the pouncing cat which once adorned the bonnet. And at the rear, the small taillamps are one of the few markers which break the simplicity of line – with reversing lamps concealed within a chrome trim and delicate wings in place of a plinth above the rear plate, the rear three-quarter aspect of the XJ is simple without being spartan. The radiator grille supports this; lacking a traditionally heavy surround and framed by square horn grilles. Especially in Old English White, there's a delicacy about the shape which belies its size.

But if simplicity is your thing, the Mercedes is better still. For there are three basic boxes – one for the engine, one for the passengers and one for the luggage. The taillamps are square, the grille is square, the headlamps are oblong. It's a homage to the simplistic and the rectilinear, with even the fuel filler concealed behind a flap next to the rear registration plate. It's only in the details that you see where the design flourishes – look at the shape of the doors by the crease halfway down the flanks, and you see flamboyant curvature hidden within what is otherwise a study in Bauhaus design. The Terracotta Red paint supports its vaguely architectural appearance – it's a shape you can appreciate, but unlike the Jaguar it's not a shape with which to fall in love with.

While both lack fussiness, they cater for very different tastes. Cosmetically, we'd say the Jaguar has the edge over the plainer Mercedes.

Inside, the two cars are very different. While a black interior is contrary to what we might expect of an XJ, the black leather in this 2.8 suits the car well. It not only looks the part, but it also smells the part too.

The dashboard is a clear evolution of the 420 saloon before it – the same plank of polished walnut, the same style of gauges, but for safety reasons toggle switches have been replaced by rocker switches. We like the aluminium trim around the radio, and around the gear selector – adding a sense of modernity to the first of a line subsequently known for its traditionalism. Like subsequent Jaguars, there's a feeling of cosiness rather than one of supreme space, though in here the feeling is cosseting rather than cramped. Only in the rear does that change, where there's a smidgen too little headroom for taller passengers owing to the shape of the roof.

The Mercedes is a very different kettle of fish – not only does the tan interior look airier, but the car feels airier owing to a higher roofline and greater shoulder space. There's no centre armrest in this one, but the stowage box is replaced with a useful carpeted shelf. The trim is simplistic – with Mercedes' traditional Zebrano wood finish to the dash and an absence of visual frippery elsewhere. The door cards are vinyl, the centre console plastic, the instruments housed in a small pod. But while there's an absence of prestige in here, everything feels phenomenally well put together. The difference between the two cars in static terms boils down to this; you buy the Jaguar if you want to show the neighbours you can afford the finer things in life, while you buy the Mercedes if you want to pay a premium for a car that will last for generations. It's a toss-up between luxury and quality, and we would respect either choice.

And this impression is retained from behind the wheel. Piloting the Mercedes, you don't feel like you're in a design that dates from the late Sixties – it feels more like an early Eighties car as an overall package. The engine pulls well, better than the figures would have you think, while the

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ride is just on the modern side of cosseting and the steering is nicely weighted. It's perhaps a little lifeless, though – you lack the confidence to throw the Mercedes into a corner, and it's more of a pleasant place to be than an engaging driver's car. This is probably a good thing, as when you do try to push on, it kneels and leans, and you start to worry that the rear end might break away. It's an excellent car, and well up to everyday use even today, but if you want something to throw around you'll be better off with the Jaguar.

Which offers poise beyond the abilities of its drivetrain. The power assistance of the XJ6's steering might be a little too light for real confidence, but there's a lot of grip and the car remains poised however you treat it. It's more like a sports car than a luxury saloon, and the fact that it was still earning praise two decades on shows how good this car would have felt at the tail end of the Sixties. Moreover, you feel better supported in the seat than on the Mercedes' pew, and there's far more grip available than in the Mercedes in the corners. This was a car designed by drivers for drivers, and it shows. It's just a pity that it lacks the power to use the grip effectively. Regardless of what the basic figures say, this car doesn't have the power or the torque of the Mercedes, and it's rather more 'grace, space, and snail's pace' than Jaguar would want people to think. It will cruise perfectly happily at motorway speeds but standing start and in-gear acceleration are poor. Several times on test when moving between locations the Mercedes left the Jaguar standing on A-roads, and both editor Paul and I felt that an XJ6 4.2 would have been a closer comparison on the road in terms of performance.

The Mercedes-Benz offers more power and a solid-feeling experience. But we think that the ardent driver would derive a greater pleasure from the Jaguar.

Of the two cars we have on test there was only ever going to be one winner. Both brands are dear to me on a personal level – I grew up in Jaguars, I've owned a number of both XJs and Mercedes saloons. I have no real bias here. But the 250 feels like a more complete package than the Jaguar.

For a start, there's more room inside the cabin for larger drivers, and with the exception of rear legroom the XJ is eclipsed by the 250 in all interior measurements. Even the boot is more ample. It's also a smaller car and thus easier to live with, easier to park and easier to get into the garage. There's also the alarming difference in the way the two cars perform.

Where the Jaguar claws a lot of distance back is in its aesthetic and driver appeal as a package. It's a prettier car inside and out than the Mercedes, and it makes the driver feel more separate than what amounts to a Berlin taxi. It's also far more engaging when you have wound it up, the steering is sharper and there's more poise. It's certainly possible to see why for many the Jaguar would be the winner, with no questions asked.

We said earlier that it was a toss-up between luxury and quality, and we still feel that this is the case. The better built and more practical Mercedes would have made a better new car, but the Jaguar has more soul – and it is sorely tempting to allow the Jaguar's static and dynamic qualities make it the victor as a classic today. But the engine really lets it down. If we had a 4.2 on test – and new, that would have been a possible option for Mercedes money – the Jaguar would win what would be a very closely matched battle. But in 2.8-litre form, it gives away too much to the Mercedes in objective terms for the subjective to have the deciding vote. CM

Thanks to: Kim Cairns Classic Cars, Snettisham, for supplying both cars (www.kimcairnsclassics.co.uk)

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Hammer time

Fast, good looking and well-engineered, the 190E 3.2 helped give AMG an international reputation. Incredibly rare, we've tracked down what's thought to be the sole example of this super saloon in the UK **WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY** Paul Walton

➩ IT SAYS much about the ingenuity of the boffins at AMG that they were able to transform what was essentially a mid-level sales manager's car into one of the most memorable sports saloons of the late Eighties and early Nineties. Although due to its rarity the 190E 3.2 isn't as well-known today as some of the tuning company's other, more extreme products of the time, but thanks to the car's increased performance, impressive handling capabilities and tougher presence, we reckon it's one of the best. To prove this, we've found what's thought to be the sole example in the UK.

AMG was started in 1967 by former Mercedes-Benz engineers, Hans Werner Aufrecht and Erhard Melcher, the name coming from the initials of their surnames plus first letter of the town where the company was founded, Grosspach. Initially an independent manufacturer of racing engines it later expanded into modifying Mercedes road cars.

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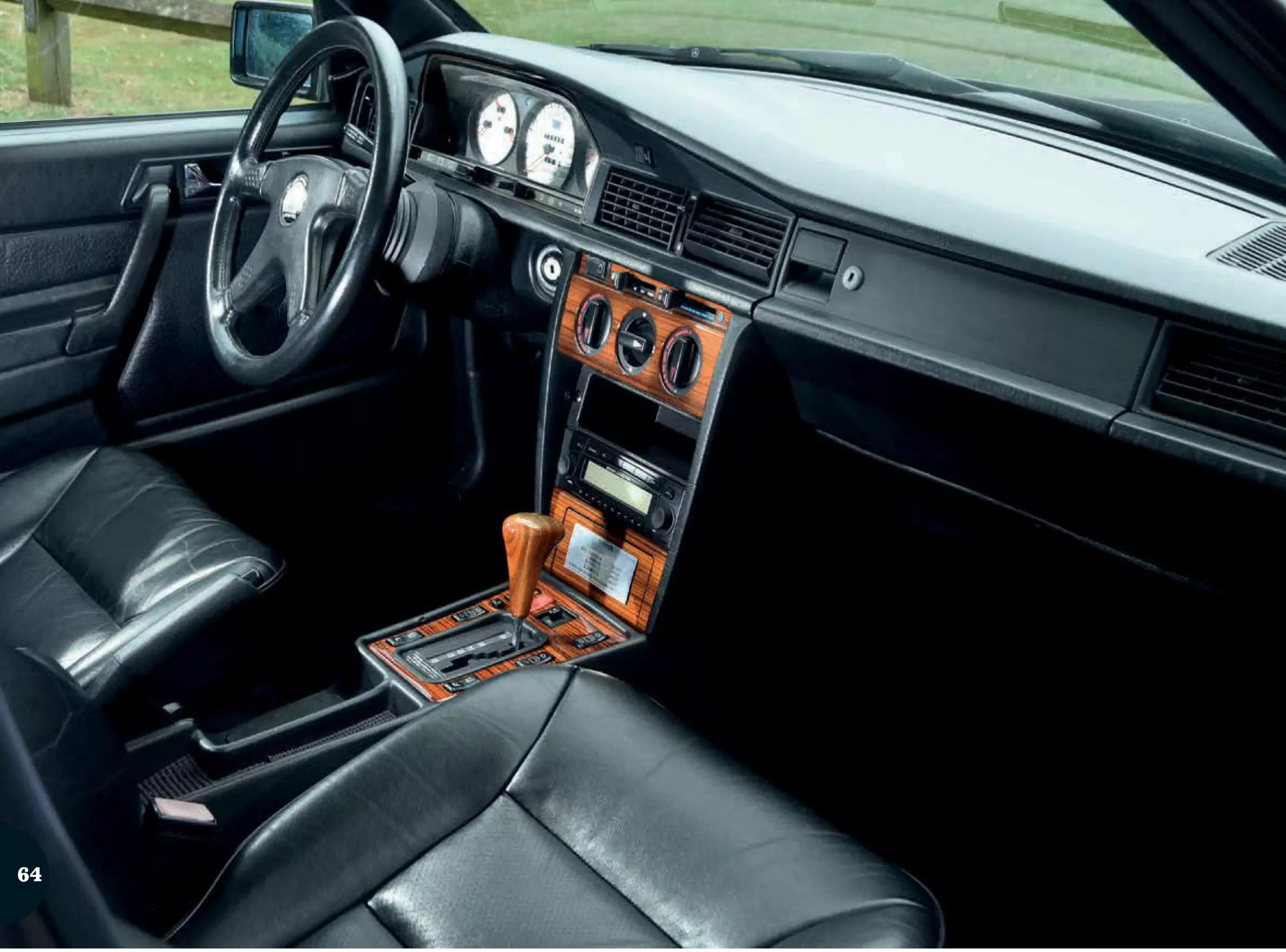
Although its range of unofficial upgrade packages grew every year, eventually encompassing most of Mercedes' cars, for the first 20 years it remained a niche tuning company aimed largely at the German market. That began to change in the mid Eighties when it revealed a V8 version of the W124 E-Class initially with 5.6 litres but later expanded to 6.0. Soon nicknamed 'The Hammer' by the press due to its huge amounts of power and towering presence, the car's reputation helped put AMG on the international map for the first time.

"No AMG car has generated more excitement than the Hammer," said a *Road & Track* special issue in 1989. "The automotive press has taken to the current AMG centrepiece in much the same manner as tabloid newspapers have embraced UFOs though the Hammer's traits and performance are easier to identify."

Yet the model that further fortified AMG's new found recognition wasn't a supercar or high powered limousine but based on Mercedes' smallest saloon. AMG had been producing a body kit ⇨



⇨ for the 190E for some time but following the introduction of the 2.6-litre model in March 1987 took its conversion a stage further.

Heart of this was the engine which AMG stretched to 3,205cc. Together with a reworked cylinder head, 90mm pistons, increasing the compression from 9.2 to 10.0:0, larger valves, gas flowed inlet, Bosch KE-III K-Tronic fuel injection plus a different camshaft increased the power from the 158bhp of the standard 2.6 to 231bhp resulting in a 0-60mph time of just seven seconds.

It was also received the AMG body kit (said to drop the car's Cd, reducing lift) that consisted of front and rear bumpers, side skirts and a three-piece ducktail spoiler, plus 16in alloys, new springs, Bilstein shock absorbers and a limited 3.27:1 limited slip diff.

The result of these engine and suspension tweaks was a genuine compact sports saloon that for the first time genuinely put the 190E into BMW M3/M5 territory.

This increased performance together with the 3.2's tougher appearance earned it the moniker of 'Baby Hammer' after its V8-engined big brother. Although at over £40k it was £22,000 more expensive than the standard 2.6, it was also cheaper than AMG's top of the range model which together with its speed made the 3.2 popular with the critics.

"The AMG transformation of the 190E scores high marks on the desirability scale," said *Road & Track*. "As it comes from Stuttgart, the baby Benz is just another kid from a good family, but in Baby Hammer guide, it's rambunctious, bouncy and ready for a good tussle with almost any opponent. A great candidate for adoption,"

Although produced between 1987 and 1993 when the 190E was replaced by the W202 generation of C-Class, just 200 genuine 190E 3.2s were made although several others had the upgrades fitted independently through AMG's official suppliers which in the UK was Strattons of Wilmslow based in Cheshire.

The majority of genuine examples were converted at AMG's factory located north of Stuttgart in Affalterbach but due to the tuning company's new found successes in the Eighties, it had opened a separate plant in Westmont, Ohio which also made a handful. Plus in 1987 AMG entered a joint venture with one of Japan's largest importers of European cars, Yanase & Co Ltd, that officially produced its cars under licence.

The 1991 example featured here is one of these rare Japanese examples and like all 190E 3.2s, it started life as a standard 2.6 with the four-speed automatic gearbox. AMG Japan then gave it the full Baby Hammer treatment which included the 3.2 engine, suspension upgrades, body kit plus handsome 16in Aero alloys.

Nothing is known about its early life but in 2021 it was imported to the UK after the current owner and Mercedes collector saw the car for sale at a garage when he was visiting Japan on business. With the country's motoring enthusiasts tending to look after their cars, apart from needing a tiny amount of paint and the rear leather

seat repaired due to damage clearly caused by a dog, it was in good condition.

Trying to reduce the number of models in his collection, the AMG is currently for sale, the car's uniqueness the reason why its online advert caught my eye. Thought to be the only 190E 3.2 AMG in the UK, it's considerably rarer than the more famous 2.5-16 Evo.

Two things strike me when I first see it parked outside. Firstly, the body kit, larger wheels and body painted grille have transformed this usually conservative saloon into something much more aggressive. Yes it's still a sales manager's car but aimed at those who don't take no for an answer.

Yet paradoxically, it's more discreet than the aforementioned Evo that with its enormous rear wing and even deeper front air dam looks more at home on a race track than a sales convention carpark. I genuinely like the fact only the Mercedes-Benz cognoscenti would recognise this 190E 3.2 AMG as something special.

The all-black interior is disappointingly standard, though, with the familiar Zebrano wood trim covering the centre console, dashboard, gear lever and door tops. Only new white dials with the company's famous logo at the bottom of the speedo help it appear less like a regional sales office.

As an all-black Mercedes-Benz, this 190E couldn't appear more German than if it wore Lederhosen and had an overflowing stein of beer in its hand but lifting the bonnet betrays its heritage. Underneath are several stickers in Japanese as there is on the ashtray cover for when it should be serviced. And if you're wondering why it's left-hand-drive when the Japanese also drive on the left, cars with the steering wheel on the wrong side are apparently considered status symbols over there.

After driving into the countryside and finding a suitably quiet road, I was finally able to give the throttle the beans. Not only am I quickly rewarded with a noticeably fruity bark from the AMG fitted sports exhaust but the straight six engine responds immediately, the rev counter needle climbing quickly to the right before the four-speed box changes up. Undeniably coarser than the usually creamy smooth 2.5, the extra speed makes up for a loss of any refinement.

Yet if I'm being totally honest, after pre reading period test reports that all praised its speed, the car isn't *quite* as quick as I thought it would be. Admittedly this one is 34 years old and performance has increased immeasurably in that time but the acceleration isn't quite as hard or as instant as other performance saloons of the era such as the BMW M5 or the supercharged 4.0 version of the Jaguar XJR. I think the issue lies with the four-speed automatic gearbox; although quick to change either up or down, I reckon cars with the five speed manual 'box would offer the kind of performance I originally imagined it would have.

So what really makes the AMG stand out then is its handling. As *Road & Track* said in 1989, "The combination of well-developed underpinnings and responsive engine

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adds up to torpedo-fast exits from hairpins and sweeping bends alike." Over 35 years later, that hasn't changed.

With the 190E already relatively light and sinewy, the suspension upgrades result in an increased composure the larger, fatter and more cumbersome XJR could only ever dream of. With fast, accurate steering and suffering from barely any body roll, the 3.2 has the same confidence through corners as a BMW M3 or Porsche 924. A series of fast left-right-left bends don't unsettle it either, the car continuing to track true and straight despite the sudden changes of direction.

What I like most about the 3.2 is unlike some other cars with after-market updates that don't always feel cohesive, this is a fully rounded and properly finished car. The boot badge might say AMG but It's clearly still a Mercedes-Benz 190E just a slighter more focused one.

It was this perfect integration by the AMG boffins of their performance updates with Mercedes' original designs why in 1990 the two signed a contract of cooperation that allowed the Affalterbach-based tuners to sell its cars through the German giant's extensive dealer network. This would eventually lead to co-developed vehicles with the first being the C36 AMG three years later. In 1999 AMG finally became part of the Daimler-Benz empire and is now a separate brand in its own right.

Whether or not it's a purpose built car such as the AMG One or uprated versions of today's sales managers cars, those three initials continue to represent the company's fastest and most extreme models just as they did when this wonderful 190E 3.2 was built over three decades ago.

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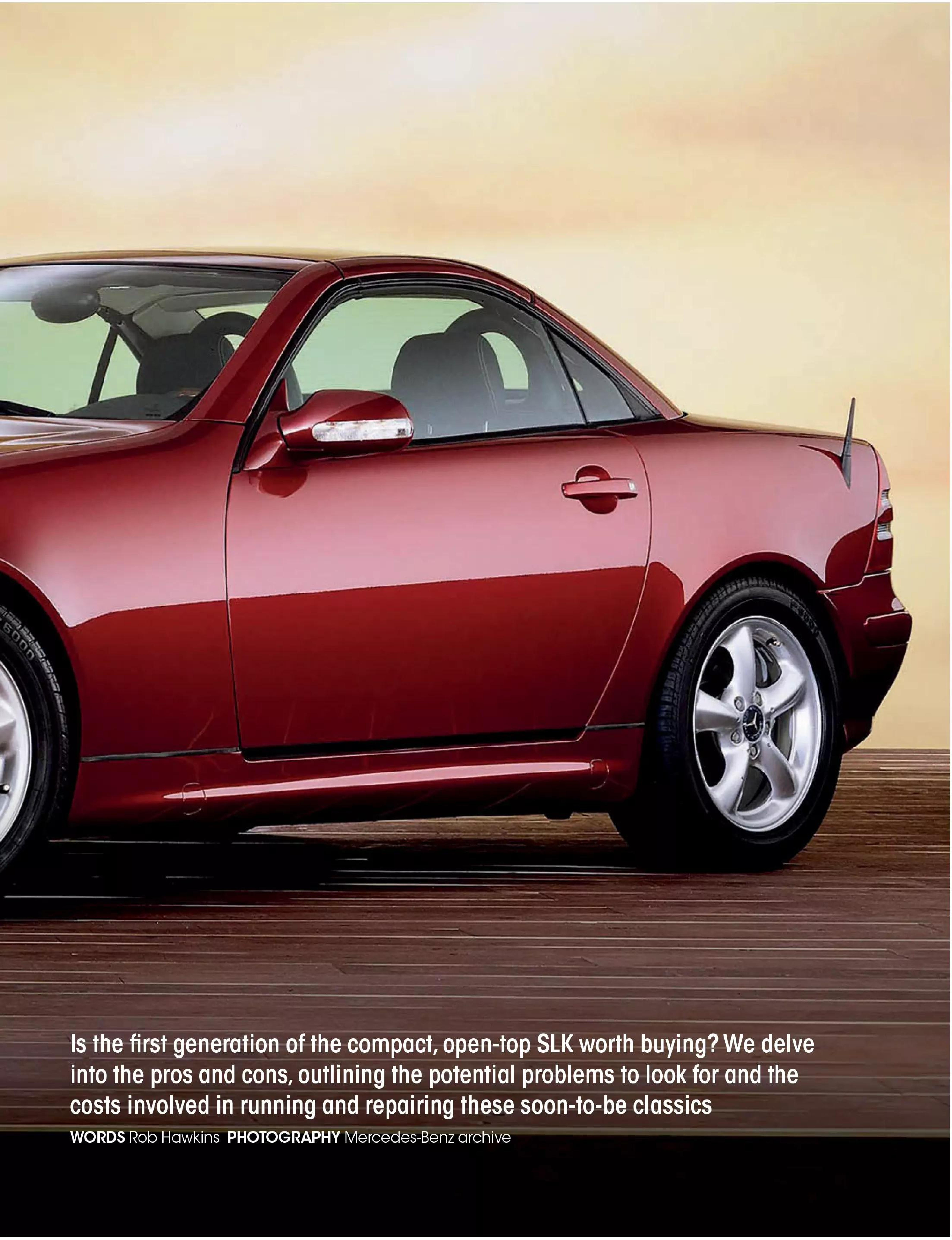
R170 SLK buying guide



Is the first generation of the compact, open-top SLK worth buying? We delve into the pros and cons, outlining the potential problems to look for and the costs involved in running and repairing these soon-to-be classics

WORDS Rob Hawkins **PHOTOGRAPHY** Mercedes-Benz archive

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Models and motors

The R170 was initially available as the SLK 200, which was powered by the four-cylinder 2-litre M111 petrol engine, but there was also the SLK 200K (K for Kompressor), initially for some export markets, which was the same engine with a supercharger. For those who couldn't buy this supercharged model, there was the SLK 230K, which was powered by a 2.3-litre supercharged version of the M111 engine.

When the R170 was facelifted in 2000, the V6 M112 3.2-litre engine was added, which produced 218bhp. And an AMG version (known as the SLK32 AMG), using the same V6 but supercharged, produced 354bhp (only available with automatic transmission).

DURING AN era when small open-top sports cars were available from almost every major motor manufacturer, with everything from the Mazda MX-5 and MGF to the Honda S2000 and Porsche Boxster, Mercedes' Sportlich, Leicht und Kurz (SLK for short and translated to mean sporty, light and short) was launched in April 1996 at the Turin Motor Show.

Code-named R170, the SLK had the technological and competitive advantage with its metal folding roof (Vario roof) and came with a choice of supercharged and naturally aspirated four-cylinder and V6 petrol engines. With rear-wheel drive, most were equipped with an automatic gearbox, although a few slipped through with manual transmission, which can still be found for sale through the classifieds.

A facelift in 2000 saw the introduction of new bumpers and body-coloured side skirts to hide the black sills.

Production at the Bremen factory lasted until the beginning of 2004, after which 311,222 SLKs had been made.

With the earliest of the R170 SLK being almost 30 years old, and the youngest not so far behind at 21, many have fallen into the bargain banger price bracket, but there are still plenty of cherished examples. The following pages outline the plus points and pitfalls should you be tempted to buy one.

Living with an SLK

The R170 is a compact sports car at around 4m long, between 1.7m and 1.9m wide and less than 1.3m tall. Consequently, it should fit inside most single garages. For a reasonably small car, there's a generous 355 litres of boot space,

although this is reduced when the roof is down, but there are numerous storage places inside the cabin, ranging from nets behind the seats to the glovebox.

Expect to pay between £360 and £430 in annual car tax for an SLK. And if you venture into London's ultra-low emission zone (ULEZ), then a 2001-onwards SLK appears to be free, whereas anything registered in 2000 or before incurs a £12.50 daily fee. However, we recommend checking a vehicle you intend to purchase by entering its registration number on the Department for Transport website (see tfl.gov.uk/modes/driving/check-your-vehicle).

Fuel consumption is around 30 to 40mpg for the smaller four-cylinder 200 models, decreasing not so much to around 25mpg for the top-of-the-range SLK32 AMG.

The SLK was crash-tested in 2002 and it achieved an NCAP rating of four stars.

Servicing costs can vary but appear to be straightforward to follow. Hilton & Moss (01279 813907 hiltonandmoss.com) charges a starting price of £504 including VAT for an A-service on an SLK, which includes a general vehicle inspection, including bodywork and brakes, engine oil and filter change and an engine inspection.

It's worthwhile joining some of the Mercedes Clubs that can help with running and fixing an SLK. SLK World (www.slkworld.com), for example, is free to join the forum, but membership provides access to ad-free pages and premium forums.

Which one to buy

Mark Taylor, who sells a range of Mercedes (see www.mtsv.co.uk), favours the early models, which he says have side repeaters in the front wings, not the door mirrors. He has found these early SLKs are less prone to rust and have better paintwork.

With prices starting at around £1,000, is it worth the gamble on a bargain banger?

"I bought my girlfriend an SLK 230K about four years ago," recalls Adam Davey at convertible roof specialist Cayman Autos (01737 761599 caymanautos.co.uk). "It was a 2004 with the roof not working, 60k on the clock and it cost £800 – I didn't tell her about the price! She's still got it now and it's going strong."

It appears inevitable that all SLKs from the R170 generation will eventually appreciate in value, but more so with the

continues on page 74 ⇨

Transmission trouble

With a choice of automatic and manual gearboxes, there appears to be more autos for sale at present, which is a five-speed, whereas the manual 'box is a six-speed.

"Manuals were few and far between and the 'box was notchy and unpleasant," remarks Michael at Mercanix. "I remember doing a pre-delivery inspection on a manual SLK 320 and being excited to test-drive it, but ultimately, I found it disappointing. Mercedes makes beautiful auto boxes and horrible manual ones."

The automatic gearbox (known internally as 722.6) is used in most Mercedes models from around the late 90s, along with a number of Chryslers.

"Earlier models had the gear selector which allowed you to select 4, 3, 2 beyond drive and later models had the Tiptronic gear selector," says Michael at Mercanix.

The oil and filter for the automatic gearbox should be changed every 35,000 to 45,000 miles, although with low-mileage examples, this may be very infrequent. The pilot or pin bush for the wiring that's routed into the gearbox should be changed to avoid oil leaks, which can result in oil working its way up the wires and contaminating the ECU.

ECU Testing advises that on models with an automatic gearbox, look out for problems with a lack of gear selection, explaining, "The gear selector will cause problems preventing selection of any forward or reverse gears until the ignition is cycled. The gear selector position will not be recognised on the gear display or will show incorrectly. If the vehicle is in gear when the gear selector module fails, you will find that you are not able to select Park (P) again until the ignition is cycled."

ECU Testing also says that this fault will not result in any warning lights being displayed, but fault codes will be stored, which relate to selector lever position detection failed and CAN signal selector lever position. An overhaul of the gear selector lever assembly costs between £162 and £222 including VAT (postage is extra).

On all gearboxes, listen for clonks and whining during a test drive, which may be caused by worn propshaft couplings.

With rear-wheel drive, look underneath the back end of the car for the differential and where the propshaft is located. Mark at MTSV says the pinion seal inside the diff can leak, which can be fixed in situ, but requires the propshaft to be removed.

Trim trouble

"The interior trim can look tired, and buyers should look out for door cards which have been removed many times as they can start to come apart making them impossible to secure tightly and leaving them looking tatty," explains Michael at Mercanix.

Many plastic switches have a rubberised finish, which can wear and flake off, especially near the handbrake. Rubberised repair paint is available, but it's a time-consuming job to overhaul these parts.

If the small rubber grommets (buttons) have fallen out of the sill covers (also called kick plates), then Richard at SLK Parts (www.slkparts.co.uk) sells a pack of 54 of them for £17.95 and says that Mercedes doesn't sell them, only a replacement sill cover, which is around £200.

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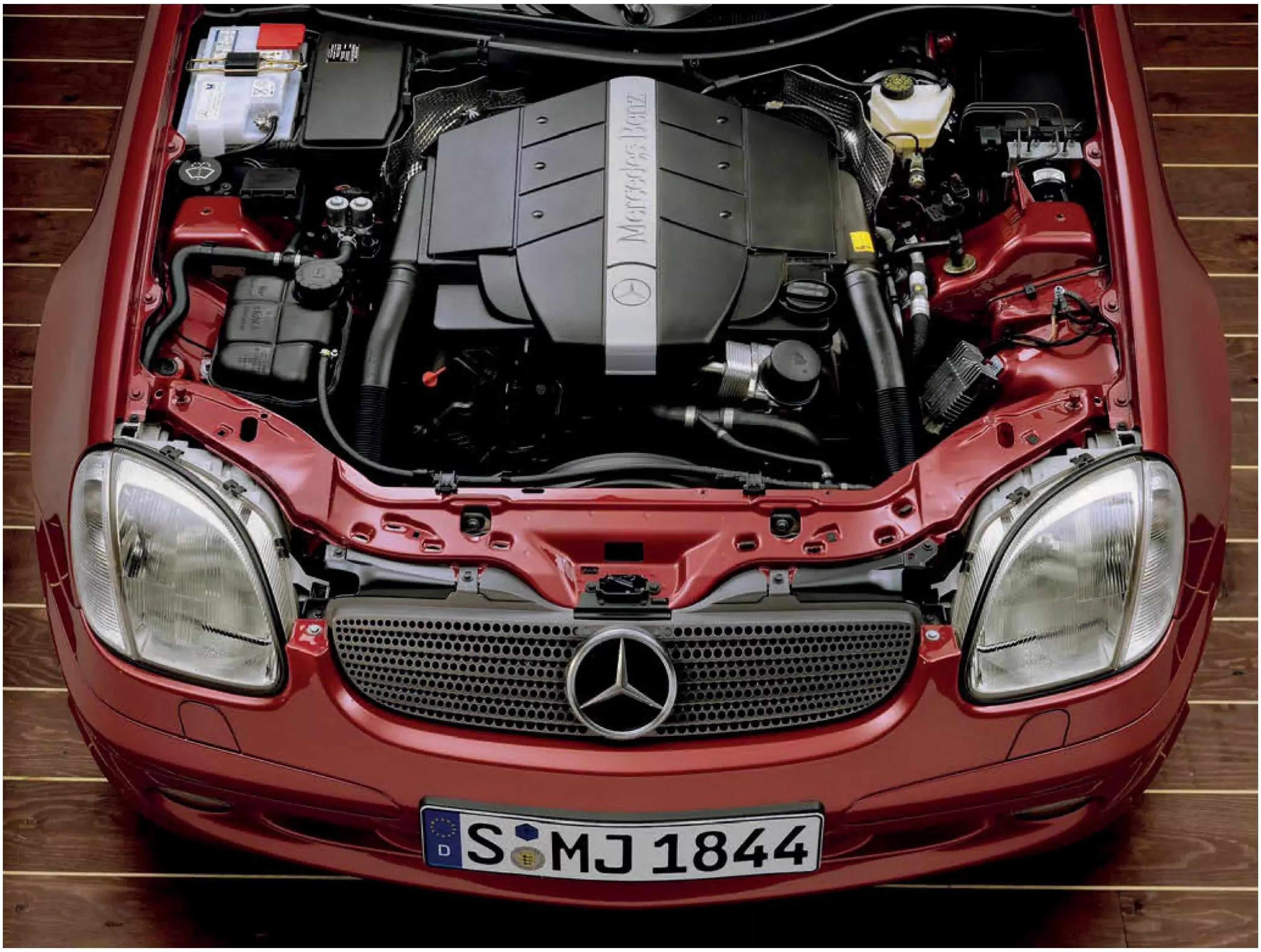

⇨ collectables, such as the AMG-badged models. Expect to pay between £10,000 and £15,000 for one of these, but that's not to say its higher price and desirability guarantee trouble-free motoring, so a thorough inspection is essential.

Michael at independent Mercedes-Benz specialist Mercanix (01344 851586, 01252 961912 www.mercanix.co.uk) says, "Bang for your buck, I'd probably go for a 230K over a V6. The exhaust note is great, and the power delivery is enough to feel exciting but without getting you into trouble."

If you are looking for a late model from 2004, then Mark Taylor warns that some from this era are the later R171 model – there was no official date when the R170 ended and the R171 began, so it's possible to find an R171 that's older than an R170.

Engine issues

All the R170's engines (four-cylinder M111 and V6 M112) feature a timing chain with overhead camshafts and variable valve timing.

Mark Taylor recommends looking around the front of the engine for oil leaks. The timing chain cover can leak oil, but he has also found that if the head gasket is starting to fail, oil leaks will appear between the cylinder head and the top of the engine block.

On the supercharged four-cylinder engine (200K and 230K models), Mark advises to listen for blowing around the exhaust manifold in the engine bay. The exhaust manifold can crack and leak. It's a small cast iron assembly, which costs £100 to £200 used (we found these are no longer available new through Mercedes dealers).

Specific to the V6 engines, failure of the crankshaft position sensor is a common issue, resulting in running issues (or not running at all) and fault codes (accessible using a fault code reader). The sensor is located at the back of the engine, next to the gearbox bellhousing (it uses the flywheel to calculate engine timing). Mark has found it can be difficult to extract the old sensor, and if it's stuck, it may mean the gearbox has to be removed.

Mark has also found the rear crankshaft oil seal can leak on the V6, but says that regular use of the car often fixes the problem. And Michael at Mercanix says, "I'd venture you would be hard-pressed to find one which didn't have a bit of oil residue around the bellhousing, but it never progresses to the point of warranting any attention."

Mark says he's noticed oil leaks can emerge around the V6's rocker covers because the seal for its breathers can fail. Oil may leak onto the exhaust manifold and burn, resulting in smoke and a smell of burnt oil. Resealing the rocker covers will fix this problem. And the mass airflow or MAF sensor can fail, sometimes as a result of a blocked breather that leads to oil contamination of the sensor and running issues for the engine (often identified by a related fault code), which costs £150 to £200 for a genuine replacement.

On all R170 engines, Mark recommends listening for rattles from the catalytic converter(s), which appear to be more of an issue on cars that see little use (regular heat cycles help to keep them free of

moisture). He says that whilst a genuine cat can cost as much as £2,000, he has found aftermarket cats from the likes of BM Catalysts are cheaper, which are available through motor factors including GSF Car Parts (www.gsfcarparts.com). Another alternative is to visit an exhaust specialist, such as Tony Banks (0113 279 8944 www.tonybanks.co.uk), who can make and fit road-legal sports cats.

And as a further bonus when replacing a cat, if you sell an old genuine cat for scrap (i.e. to a metal scrap buyer), you'll recover most of the cost of buying the aftermarket replacement.

Evidence of servicing is important, especially if you are paying a good price for an R170 SLK. Engine oil changes should be completed every year. The recommended interval for the spark plugs ranges between every three and five years, regardless of mileage.

Replacing the spark plugs on the V6 engine is time-consuming and may have been neglected, so ask to see evidence of this if the seller claims they have been changed.

Derbyshire-based ECU Testing (01773 535638 www.ecutesting.com) says that on the post-facelift SLK 320 (2000-2004), if the engine idles poorly and cuts out, this may be caused by an internal component failure inside the throttle body. The cost of overhauling an old throttle body is £126 including VAT (postage is extra).

Electrical issues

The K40 relay module appears to be the biggest talking point on the R170 when it comes to electrical issues. It houses several relays, which control the fuel pump, engine ECU, a secondary air pump (for exhaust emissions), traction control system and, in some cases, even the horn! It's located in the engine bay, next to the battery on the nearside.

"When the engine management light came on in my 2003 SLK32 AMG, the fault was traced to a scorched relay on the K40 panel for the secondary air pump," recalls R170 owner Nick Wilcock (see a separate account of his ownership at the end of this buying guide). "Investigation and replacement of the K40 module came to £279.60 including VAT – the K40 itself cost £186 including VAT. The secondary air pump is only needed during warm-up to reduce emissions, but it takes a lot of current and I'm not sure that the relay is man-enough for the load. The garage told me that secondary air pump failure (or the control relay) is quite common in certain cars."

Michael at Mercanix mentions another air pump/blower (part number A2105450195) that circulates air around the control units in the module box and says, "It's not super common for these to go wrong but when they do, they will blow fuse 7 and stop the roof from working – the roof switch won't illuminate. The Mercedes wiring diagram doesn't show the blower as being fused so this can be a difficult fault to pin down if you are following the documentation."

Still on the subject of blowers, Michael also recommends switching on the heater inside the cabin and operating all of its speed settings. "Blower motor resistor packs are a common fault, resulting in the fan only working on maximum speed."

Next to the K40 relay module, there's a 38-pin diagnostic connector on early cars to help retrieve fault codes using a modern fault code reader (an adapter plug is required as most FCRs use a later 16-pin connector), whereas later models have a 16-pin OBDII port in the driver's side of the dashboard, next to the bonnet-release lever.

Issues with the lights, alarm and central locking could concern the PSE module in the boot, which is next to the spare wheel and outlined further under our information on corrosion.

If only one key is supplied with the vehicle, it's worthwhile sourcing a spare, which is straightforward on later models, but not so easy on earlier ones. Matt at Birmingham-based Replacement Mercedes Keys (0756 301 4634 www.replacementmercedeskeys.co.uk) says, "Prices vary from repair to replacement and the early one-button keys can be a nightmare." He charges upwards of £108 including VAT for a repair, £300

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to supply a two-button key and £600 for a single-button key. If there are no keys, then his prices start at £480.

Vario roof

The folding metal roof is reliable – it's called a Vario roof. It's hydraulically operated and there's a fluid reservoir and pump in the right side of the boot. The luggage cover needs to be in position to operate a microswitch and enable the roof to be folded down.

If the roof doesn't operate at all, the pump's relay may have failed, which is next to it in the boot and is straightforward to replace.

Michael at Mercanix explains that by double-clicking the roof switch forwards or backwards you can open or close both front windows simultaneously.

"The SLK's Vario roof is fantastic in that it's so simple," says Adam at Cayman. "We rarely have one that has an expensive repair bill."

With the roof up, Adam recommends looking above the rear-view mirror for a rubber bung that's the size of a 10 pence coin. Remove the bung to reveal a hexagonal hole (for fitting a hex/Allen key), which is the emergency release for the roof. If there are traces of hydraulic fluid here, there is probably a fluid leak. And look around the front area of the headlining inside the car for stains, which could also mean hydraulic fluid for the roof has leaked.

The roof needs regular use to avoid the risk of microswitches becoming seized. If the roof squeaks when operated, the seals may have become dry but can be lubricated with Krytox grease or an equivalent, such as Sonax Gummi Pflege.

Talking of microswitches, Michael at Mercanix explains, "A very common roof problem is for the microswitches along the front of the Vario roof to stick, resulting in the roof stopping after the rear windows drop and the bootlid tilts open. A few bangs on the front of the Vario roof will often then temporarily fix the issue, but the real underlying cause is the plastic sheath on the microswitches becoming brittle. Removing the roof panel and tearing the sheath slightly releases the switch and will fix the issue."

Water ingress through the roof doesn't seem to be a major issue, but its drain channels can become blocked, so check they are clear. At the rear, blocked drain channels will direct water into the boot, which can soak the PSE pump (see the section on corrosion for more information). Open the bootlid and look for the drain channels.

Problems with front drain points can direct water into the passenger footwell, where there are electrical components that can become damaged, resulting in battery drain issues, faulty lights and annoying electrical gremlins. Lift the bonnet and look at the back of the engine bay for the large plenum area and its drain holes.

Steering and suspension

With most components being shared with the W202 C-Class, parts availability is good.

The steering uses an old-fashioned steering box, which is hydraulically power

Corrosion

Rust is the biggest problem to look for on an R170, so be meticulous with inspecting the bodywork. Check the front and rear wheelarches for bubbling paint, which is often the first sign of rust. The plastic bumpers can rub against the metalwork, resulting in corrosion. Facelift models may have sill covers, which will hide any corrosion, but they can be partly inspected by removing the small covers for the jacking points.

If the sills can be inspected, check the small drain holes along the bottom edge are clear – this enables water to escape. If the front wings are rotten, try to pull the wheelarch liner away to see if the rust has spread to the bulkhead.

Repair panels and used or new bolt-on front wings are available from around £50, with new wings costing around £200. The problem with corrosion, however, is that it often spreads. So, rust around the bottom of a rear wheelarch may spread to the sill and beyond. Consequently, whilst the cost of repair panels can be cheap (a sill repair panel costs around £150), the final bill for welding and paint will be much more.

At the front of a car, look around the indicator lenses to see if there's corrosion in the surrounding bodywork. And look along the leading edge of the bonnet, where it can rust because of road debris hitting it.

Move to the rear of the car to check the bootlid for rust, particularly around the handle. Open the boot, empty its contents and look for water ingress. There's a PSE (pneumatic system equipment) pump for the central locking mounted in the right (offside) of the spare wheel well. It sits inside a foam jacket to help dampen noise, but can become soaked with water if there's a leak into the boot. If the pump fails, the central locking won't work, so check it. A new pump costs £200 to £300, whereas a used pump is around half this amount, and some specialists can have the pump reconditioned.

Adam at Cayman warns that if the paintwork around the windscreen surround has bubbled or there are signs of corrosion, then whilst there may be rust issues to address, there could also be water ingress in the cabin. He explains that the bond between the windscreen and its surround can fail, allowing water through.

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⇨ assisted. There are potentially more wearable joints on a steering box system than a later rack-and-pinion, so if there are any clonks when turning the steering wheel, or it feels notchy, further investigation is required to look for worn joints and to check the condition of the steering damper, which absorbs feedback from the road wheels.

If you can locate the steering box, look around it for fluid leaks. A refurbished box costs around £300 or more, whereas used units are much cheaper, but are a gamble as to how long they will last.

Michael at Mercanix also recommends inspecting the steering damper (part number A124463043264) for fluid leaks (misting), saying, "You can almost guarantee it will have lost all its oil and have no resistance. It's a very simple job to swap over and replacing a tired one will instantly make the steering feel more precise."

And Michael also warns the inner joints on the steering drag links are prone to wear.

The R170's suspension consists of upper and lower wishbones at the front and a five-link set-up at the rear, with anti-roll bars at the front and rear and separate coil springs and telescopic dampers at all four corners of the car.

Look for the typical signs of suspension wear, such as misting (leaks) around the dampers, fractured and corroded coil springs and perished rubber mounting bushes (if you can see them). A knocking noise when driving may be caused by worn mounting bushes for suspension components and/or worn drop-links on the ends of the anti-roll bars.

Mark at MTSV explains there are four brace bars underneath the vehicle which help to stiffen up the bodyshell. He's noticed that if these corrode and break, the handling of the vehicle can be noticeably affected, so check they are intact.

Wheels and tyres

With wheel sizes ranging from 15in to 17in, the rear wheels should be wider than the fronts. Be cautious with aftermarket wheels that may have a different width and also a different offset, which could adversely affect the handling of the car. Genuine wheels are specific to the R170 and start with part number A170, which may be displayed on each wheel. Five-spoke AMG 17in rims are a popular fitment on to non-AMG models.

Brakes

A servo-assisted braking system is employed on the R170, which features discs all round, although the handbrake operates a set of shoes inside a drum that's part of each rear disc.

If possible, visually inspect the brake discs for corrosion and excessive wear.

"As with all Mercedes which have the parking brake shoes inside the rear discs, check the backplate is in good condition," says Michael at Mercanix. "They can rust through around the points where the retaining springs for the parking brake shoes attach, leaving the parking brake shoes rattling around inside the disc. New backplates are inexpensive, but replacement requires removal of the hub, which in turn requires removal of the wheel bearing so it can be quite the job."

During a test drive, try to avoid braking whilst slowing down to stop, then switch off the engine and check each brake disc to see if any are hotter than the rest (don't touch the disc, just place your hand nearby). Any that are noticeably hotter may be dragging, which could be caused by sticking pads or a sticking piston inside the caliper.

Mark at MTSV has found that if all of the brakes are noticeably hot, this can be caused by a worn bushing in the brake pedal that results in the pedal remaining partly down and still applying the brakes, ⇨

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⇨ despite no pressure being applied to the pedal. To check this, press the pedal and release it (not whilst driving), then use your hands to try to lift it up. If it moves further up, the pedal is sticking.

The sticky pedal seems to be caused by changes in temperature and humidity, so it's not always apparent. Fortunately, the pedal is only bolted in, so it can be removed and replaced.

If there are any ABS/ESP warning lights, the problem could be a failed brake light switch, but as Michael at Mercanix explains, "The switch actually contains two switches – one normally open and one normally closed. If one fails, you will get the ABS/ESP warning lights on the dashboard, but the brake lights will still work." Removing and testing the switches will help to diagnose the ABS/ESP warning lights, and Mark at MTSV has found they cost around £15 from parts manufacturer febi bilstein and take around 20 minutes to fit.

If the problem is more complicated, it could be caused by a failed wheel speed sensor, or a snapped reluctor ring. This works with the wheel speed sensor and is a toothed ring that on the rear, is wrapped around each driveshaft. If it's broken, the speed readings are affected, so it needs to be replaced. Removal of the driveshaft is required to change it.

However, if there's an issue with the ABS pump, resulting in fault code C1000, ECU Testing says that on models from 2000 onwards, this is usually caused by an internal component failure that prevents communication to the ABS system. It can rebuild the combined ABS pump and control unit for £252 including VAT (postage is extra).

On the SLK 230 between 1996 and 2000, ECU Testing has found that ABS pump and valve body faults can arise, with fault codes relating to the pump motor and/or solenoid malfunction. "This will prevent full operation of the emergency braking system," they say and charge £252 including VAT (postage is extra) to overhaul an old unit. CM

Owner's opinion: Nick Wilcock

Nick Wilcock bought his SLK32 AMG on the 13 August 2005 from Mercedes-Benz of Redhill. In classic Brilliant Silver, the car has a 'Designo' Bordeaux interior.

At the time of buying it, his SLK32 AMG had a mere 7,750 miles on the odometer since its first date of registration on 13 May 2003. The last time we spoke to Nick, it was showing 101,805 miles.

"The car's performance has been stunning," he says, explaining that with 354bhp it hits 60mph from stationary in 4.8 seconds, "and I've cruised at 140mph on autobahns without limits."

The SLK32 AMG is powered by a supercharged V6 petrol engine, and Nick says, "It's impossible to tell when the supercharger is engaged; the system solenoid is isolated in neutral or with less than 1,300rpm but the supercharger doesn't come into play until the rpm is above 2,900 or the load required is more than 44 per cent. I would have liked a small blue light in the tachometer to show when it's working though! Overall fuel consumption is around 25mpg, mainly on country roads rather than in towns."

Nick says he finds the steering is satisfactory (it's a steering box with hydraulic power assistance) and comments, "I've got used to the rather firm suspension and the somewhat abrupt automatic gearchanges but would have preferred a 'softer' transmission programme in 'W' mode."

With a five-speed automatic gearbox (all SLK32 AMG models have this gearbox), it has AMG model-specific software.

Repairs over the last 20 years have included a new regulator (motor) for the rear side window, new suspension ball-joints, supercharger intercooler pump replacement, a new crankshaft position sensor along with the crank and idler pulleys and a dodgy interior light unit needed fixing. All of these jobs were completed under a Mercedes-Benz extended warranty. "Since then, I needed a K40 relay unit replacing due to scorched relay contacts for the secondary air injection pump" explains Nick.

When we ask him about corrosion, he says, "Yes - lots! These cars rust worse than an Arctic trawler, it seems. Mainly the front wings, all wheelarches and the boot lock panel. But it has all been treated and resprayed professionally. I've also had the alloys refurbished."

The only minor gripe he has concerns the SLK's now-dated infotainment system. "It's fitted with the Bose audio system which has two rear speakers as well as the four in the front. The radio doesn't have a front/rear fader, which is a pity. It took some specialist work to get it to function correctly with my Nokia 6310i hands-free system though. Rather than a built-in GPS, I have a Garmin nüvi on a dash top mount."

Nick has discovered that his SLK is one of only 29 SLK32 AMG models sold in the UK in 2003, and only 12 of them have survived to date.

"Will the SLK32 AMG become a sought-after classic in future years?" he asks. "Who knows?"

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The bigger picture

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY Rob Hawkins

Dan Powell of **Yorkshire Classic & Sports Cars** has built his business with a vision that extends beyond selling cars. We find out what he particularly likes about Mercedes and how he has established a network of customers who keep coming back

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Dan Powell started Yorkshire Classic & Sports Cars in 2013

THE BUSINESS of selling classic cars isn't an easy one. The higher the price, the more demanding the customers can be, yet no matter what the make or model, you are dealing with old cars that have a greater risk of going wrong.

Speaking to 37-year-old Dan Powell, who owns Ripon-based Yorkshire Classic & Sports Cars, he's very much aware of the pitfalls involved in the classic and sports car trade, going further to say that customers often rightly want evidence of provenance and history, and recalls the many places on some models of Mercedes where identity numbers can be found to ascertain authenticity.

The assortment of cars in the YC&SC showroom appear to be spotless. Perhaps Dan only chooses good cars that he's confident of selling.

When he points to the most expensive Mercedes in the showroom car park, a

Tucked away in Ripon, North Yorkshire, YC&SC's showroom has a selection of mouth-watering classics

1968 W113 280SL Pagoda, he explains that he first sold it in April of 2018 then recently bought it back, confident it was good enough to sell again. The specification alone is mouth-watering, with rare 903H Pastel China Blue paintwork, a manual gearbox and the familiar-looking hardtop featuring a concave centreline (hence the Pagoda name which resembles the roofline of traditional Asian Pagoda buildings). Having been restored in 2010, but still with evidence of matching numbers, original panels and body codes, its £124,995 price tag is in one respect, high, but as Dan explains, "You cannot put a price on authenticity and originality. This car has a fully traceable ownership from day one and originally carried the registration 'FAB 1'."

After recently advertising the Pagoda for sale, "We had a call from its second keeper who bought the car in April 1971 with only 12,000 miles, along with his friend who bought a similar Pagoda from the same dealer, but an automatic car, now 93 years of age and remembers the car like it was yesterday," says Dan. "This is why we do what we do. We love to hear the stories and meet the custodians of these cars. Our 93-year-old friend asked if he could come and spend some time with the car and with his family before he may not be able to. Some of his family never believed the stories told about this car in its early days of clocking 150mph on the motorway!"

When the gentleman visited YC&SC and delved into the history file (whilst reminiscing over a coffee) and took a look at one of the early V5Cs with his name and address on, "Well that was it, an emotional time for them all," says Dan. "We sent him home with a copy to frame along with his photo in the car to place on his wall of fame! We all know too well that many of these cars are bodged together with parts from breakers over the years, so it's rare to find an honest example such as this, but once you do, you buy it!"

Whilst the hood of this 1957 220S Ponton Cabriolet is about to be repaired on the inside, the interior's upholstery and wood is going to remain untouched to show its patina

As we look over the selection of Mercedes in the showroom car park, Dan points to a customer's Gold W123 240 diesel from 1981, which has just broken into the 30k bracket on the odometer and is only on its third owner. The owner has several Mercedes models, most of them diesel powered along with another

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Brian James-covered trailer comes in useful for collections and deliveries

DANIEL POWELL
STUDIO
YORKSHIRE
CLASSIC & SPORTS C

280SL
MNM 566

ABOVE LEFT: Being in the design business, it's no surprise that Dan had his signage laser cut and then left it out in all weathers to create the rust effect

ABOVE RIGHT: At 57 years old, this 280SL Pagoda was restored in 2010 and is now for sale at £124,995

immaculate W123 3OOD with under 30k miles on it and has also converted a few to diesel in his time.

Dan tells me he has been after this Gold car for some time, but prying it from the current owner's hands is proving difficult – along with his W123 300D, he would buy the pair in a heartbeat.

"We have a great and trusted network of clients across the UK who call in and see us regularly," he says. "More often than not in their cars and what better way to buy a car from the person that's owned it, cherished it, driven it and knows it, rather than needing to trawl Autotrader, which is something I rarely do."

Dan appears to have a hands-on approach to his cars. Whilst he hasn't got the time or facilities in-house to conduct the servicing and any major repairs on all of the vehicles he has in stock, he does know his way around them and recalls dismantling the interior of an AC Ace to determine its originality (many of the body panels were stamped on the inside with the chassis number).

He comments on a very rare 450SEL, explaining he bought it from a local collector, detailed and enhanced it so that it was ready for sale, only for the said owner to call in for a coffee, see how immaculate it now was, prompting him to fall back in love with it (even though he already had another 450SEL) and asked to buy it back!

As we look over a 1957 220S Ponton Cabriolet, Dan explains that the outer fabric of the hood had been changed a few years ago with a previous owner, but clearly the inner section now needed replacing and would be done by a local trimmer later this year. However, he's rightly not so keen to alter the interior upholstery or its woodwork, which has a stunning patina to it and although well used, looks perfectly aged. It would be spoilt if it was overhauled and with a price tag of £74,995, "I would choose an original interior such as this over a restored car any day of the week," he states. "They are only original once, the enjoyment you get out of owning a car with the charm and patina of something like our 220S Ponton is unlike that of any fresh restoration."

Having the contacts and access to collections is one of the key points to finding good classic cars, and this is where Dan's other skills come in handy. He originally trained as an architectural technician and still runs a business designing buildings (residential and commercial of all scales), including working on bringing a purpose-built luxury car storage facility and membership-only club lounge to North Yorkshire, which he says will be one of the best of its kind in the UK. Over the years he has designed and built many purpose-made buildings for car storage, be that for private clients wanting somewhere to place their collection of 10 to 20 cars or for storage businesses wanting to house 300+ cars.

Bring the two together (the building design and the classic cars) and you have the correct ingredients for accessing a network of cars, but there is a third string to Dan's bow that is just as important – his passion for cars. His overall knowledge and enthusiasm shines, no matter what make or model is discussed.

His first car was a Mk4 Volkswagen Golf GTTDi, which he recalls, "I absolutely loved it and would buy it back in a heartbeat! Following that was a C5 Audi Allroad, which I owned for a great number of years. I'm not the type to go and buy a new car every three years – I see little point. I drive and enjoy my cars, improving them and making sure the next owner, should I ever sell (I don't normally do), gets a better car than I did first time round. The Allroad sadly got written off the day after I sold it, so I can't buy that one back!"

Dan's current collection of cars includes an Audi RS6 (powered by a V10 petrol engine) for his daily runabout, along with a 1989 soft-top Land Rover Defender that comes in useful for towing. He also likes his Triumphs and has a TR6 and a 2500 PI estate. However, his favourite has got to be his 1989 Mercedes R107 560SL final edition (featured elswewhere in this issue), which he says is a bucket-list car and explains they rarely come to the market. "The car is without doubt the best R107 you can buy, having owned every other guise of the R107 series, the flagship V8 is my choice and being the later car, it benefits from all the luxuries."

Having owned and sold so many cars, many of which have been classic Mercedes, it's reassuring to see that Dan hasn't run out of enthusiasm and says, "I have never had an old Mercedes that I have not enjoyed, be that a W115 200D worth £10,000 and is most certainly quicker walking to your destination, or a rare Pagoda 280SL factory five-speed manual worth nearer £200,000. They all have their own charm and timeless design. Of all the marques you can buy, I honestly think that a classic Mercedes can be one of the most rewarding experiences you can have in classic car ownership and the beauty of the variety is it doesn't have to break the bank." CM

Thanks to Yorkshire Classic & Sports Cars, Unit 9, Ure Bank Top, Ripon HG4 1JD, 01765 609798, ycsc.co.uk.

Three convertibles in the showroom yard include a 1989 560SL in the foreground, a 1968 W113 280SL Pagoda behind it and to the right, a 1957 220S Ponton Cabriolet

CLASSIC MODEL GUIDE

Looking for a quick guide to classic Mercedes-Benz models, their values, or curious about the full range the brand has produced over the decades? This comprehensive review covers every Mercedes road car built from the late Forties through to the end of the 'young classic' era in the late Nineties. You'll find key specifications, typical price ranges and the publication date of in-depth *Classic Mercedes* articles for each model.

Values

The prices listed are drawn from both UK and international asking prices, as well as results from domestic and overseas auctions. The lower end of each range reflects the cost of a complete, running vehicle—excluding those in disassembled condition. The upper figure represents the value of a car in outstanding original or fully restored condition, including the buyer's premium typically added at auction.

W136 170

1946-1955

The pre-war W136 saloon and cabriolet, featuring distinctive 'suicide' doors, helped Mercedes-Benz restart production after World War Two. The 170V saloon arrived in 1947 with a 1.7-litre four-cylinder engine, and was succeeded in 1949 by the 170S, which offered more power and a larger body. The final variant was the 170S-V, produced from 1953 to 1955. Although German cars were rarely seen outside Germany at the time, W136 models appear for sale fairly often today and remain relatively affordable classics.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,697cc/4/38bhp - 1,767cc/4/44bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** n/a **Values** £15,000-£20,000/$20,000-$30,000 **Article date** Winter 2014

W186/W189 300

1951-1962

Nicknamed the 'Adenauer' after German Chancellor Conrad Adenauer, who used them during his time in office throughout the Fifties, the 300 marked Mercedes' return to limousine-style luxury reminiscent of the pre-war era. All variants featured a straight-six three-litre engine, which received fuel injection in 1957 when the large saloon – also offered as a four-door cabriolet – was redesigned with a sleek, pillarless body, as shown here. Though values remained low for years, well-preserved examples are now seeing strong gains at auction.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/113-158bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual, 3-speed auto **Number built** 11,413 **Values** £20,000-£100,000/$27,000-$135,000 **Article date** Autumn 2017

W187 220

1951-1955

As part of Mercedes-Benz's push to expand its model range quickly and revive post-war factory output, the 220 was launched in 1951 as a six-cylinder car derived from the 170V. While the four-door saloon was the main seller, the 220 was also available as a two-door coupe, Cabriolet A, Cabriolet B, and a four-door open tourer. Later versions featured an upgraded 2.2-litre engine, originally developed for the Ponton series

Engine/cyl/power 2,195cc/6/79-84bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** 18,467 **Values** £20,000-£40,000/$25,000-$50,000 **Article date** Winter 2018

W188 300S/Sc

1951-1958

Mercedes first established the practice of producing exclusive two-door versions of its flagship saloons with this model, derived from the prestigious 300 Adenauer. The 300S was crafted by hand by elite artisans, delivering top-tier luxury at a premium price. It came in three body styles: Coupé, Cabriolet A, and a Roadster fitted with a simpler folding roof. In 1955, the car was upgraded to the 300Sc, featuring fuel injection for its three-litre straight-six. Among post-war Mercedes models, only the legendary 300SL is more highly prized today.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/148-173bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** 760 **Values** £350,000-£650,000/$450,000-$750,000 **Article** Autumn 2015

W120/W121

1953-1962

Known as the 'Ponton' for its clever detachable engine and front subframe design, these four-cylinder models represented a major advancement for Mercedes-Benz. Their integrated chassis and body, built in a modern 'three-box' configuration, offered a big improvement in occupant safety. Initially launched with 1.8-litre petrol and diesel engines (180, 180D), they were later fitted with 1.9-litre units. As the company's first true mass-production car of the Fifties, more than half a million were made – including six-cylinder versions – with production also taking place at Mercedes' plant in South Africa.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,767cc/4/40bhp - 1,897cc/4/74bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** 442,963 **Values** £15,000-£35,000/$20,000-$45,000 **Article** Spring 2023

190SL Roadster

1955-1963

Although the Gullwing served as Mercedes' flagship sports car, the 190SL – introduced in 1955 with similar styling but a smaller body – was designed as a more accessible, higher-volume offering. It lacked the Gullwing's advanced alloy space frame, instead utilizing the more basic underpinnings of the Ponton saloon and its four-cylinder layout. Powered by a 1.9-litre engine, its performance was considered modest even in its day, but the compact roadster excelled as a refined and elegant cruiser. Nearly 26,000 units were sold, the vast majority finding homes in the American market.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,897cc/6/ 104bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** 25,881 **Values** £60,000-£200,000/$70,000-$270,000 **Article date** Autumn 2023

W180/105/128

1954-1959

Twelve months after the debut of the four-cylinder Ponton in 1953, Mercedes introduced the six-cylinder variants. These models shared the same front subframe and suspension but featured a newly engineered, more advanced rear axle. Visually, they stood apart with a longer bonnet – thanks to a 100mm stretch in the wheelbase – and extra chrome details that added an upscale touch. All versions were powered by the same 2.2-litre engine: the 220, 219, and 220S used a single carburettor, while the range-topping 220SE, introduced in the final year, came equipped with Bosch fuel injection.

Engine/cyl/power 2,195cc/6/84-113bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual, 4-speed semi-automatic **Number built** 111,035 **Values** £20,000-£40,000/ $25,000-$55,000 **Article date** n/a

W198 300SL

1954-1957

Widely regarded as the world's first true supercar, the 300SL (often called the Gullwing due to its doors) combined a fuel-injected engine with a lightweight spaceframe chassis, marking Mercedes-Benz's triumphant return to cutting-edge engineering after World War Two. It has long been celebrated as the definitive post-war Mercedes classic –particularly the ultra-rare 29 built with alloy bodies. Remarkably, it's estimated that around 95 percent of the original 1,400 cars still exist today. Now extremely valuable, most are only seen at prestigious classic car gatherings, rarely driven on public roads.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/212bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** 1,400 **Values** £1m-£6m (alloy bodied)/$1.35m-$8m **Article** Winter 2020

W180/128 220S/SE

1956-60

Though based on the six-cylinder Ponton saloon introduced two years earlier, the stylish coupé and cabriolet versions offered a distinct air of exclusivity that strongly appealed to wealthy American buyers. Built on a chassis shortened by 120mm, the initial offerings—the 220S Coupé and 220S Cabriolet—were powered by the standard 2.2-litre carburetted engine. In 1958, these models were upgraded with the same engine fitted with fuel injection for improved performance and were subsequently rebadged as the 220SE.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,195cc/6/105-118bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual, 4-speed semi-automatic **Number built** 5,371 **Values** £80,000-£200,000/ $100,000-$260,000 **Article** Summer 2018

300SL Roadster

1957-1963

Launched in 1957 as a more refined successor to the Gullwing, the W198 300SL Roadster featured traditional side-opening doors and revised rear swing-axle suspension for improved high-speed stability. Its cabin was also upgraded with a greater emphasis on comfort and luxury. While Roadster values long trailed behind those of the iconic Gullwing, recent results from major international auctions suggest this elegant open-top model – once a favourite among late-1950s Hollywood elites – is rapidly closing the gap in value with its coupe counterpart.

Engine/cyl/power 2,996cc/6/237bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual **Number built** 1,858 **Values** £800,000-£2.0m/ $1.1m-$2.5m **Article** Autumn 2023

W110 Fintail

1961-1986

The four-cylinder Fintail became a symbol of Germany's mainstream car industry in the Sixties, offering broad appeal with a roomy design well-suited for both family use and taxi service. Introduced two years after the six-cylinder variant, these shorter-nosed saloons had a split production run: early models up to mid-1965 included the 1.9-litre petrol 190c and 2.0-litre diesel 190Dc, while later versions were rebadged as the 200 and 200D. These updated models also shed the older cars' distinctive wing-mounted front indicators for a cleaner, more modern look.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,896cc/4/79bhp - 1,988cc/4/94bhp **Transmission** 4-speed manual, 4-speed automatic **Number built** 622,453 **Values** £15,000-£20,000/$20,000-$40,000 **Article date** Winter 2024

W111/W112 Fintail

1959-1968

Initially, the Fintail range was available exclusively with six-cylinder engines, all using a 2.2-litre unit, with the top variant being the fuel-injected 220SEb. In 1961, the luxurious 300SE replaced it as the flagship model, featuring advanced equipment like air suspension and carrying its own W112 designation. Today, the 300SE is by far the most sought-after Fintail.

Visually, six-cylinder versions are easy to distinguish from their four-cylinder counterparts by their longer front ends, upright headlamp clusters, and additional chrome trim.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,195cc/6/94bhp - 2,996cc/6/168bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Number built** 344,751 **Values** £20,000-£90,000/$25,000-$120,000 **Article date** Summer 2023

W113 SL 'Pagoda'

1963-1971

Produced in 230SL, 250SL (1967), and final 280SL (1968) versions, the W113 SL –nicknamed the 'Pagoda' for its distinctive inward-curving hardtop – is widely considered one of Mercedes' most beautiful post-war convertibles. It also offers a surprisingly refined driving experience today, assuming its intricate fuel-injection system is correctly tuned and the suspension is well maintained. A small number of 250SLs were built in a 'coupé' version, featuring an extended rear cabin but no soft top. Of all variants, the 280SL remains the most desirable among collectors.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,306cc/6/148bhp - 2,778cc/6/168bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Number built** 48,912 **Values** £40,000-£200,000/ $50,000-$270,000 **Article** Summer '23

W111/112 two-door

1961-1971

Introduced in 1961 and based on the Fintail chassis, the W111 coupé and cabriolet brought American buyers a generously sized, pillarless luxury model with European refinement. Both versions initially used Mercedes' standard 2.2-litre six-cylinder engine, which gave the 220SEb only modest performance. Over time, the range evolved with more powerful 2.5-, 3.0-, and finally 2.8-litre engines, reaching its peak with the 280SE 3.5 V8. This final version – especially in cabriolet form – has since become the most valuable and sought-after of the W111 series.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,195cc/6/118bhp - 3,499cc/V8/197bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Number built** 35,931 **Values** £50,000-£300,000/$65,000-$400,000 **Article** Summer 2017

W100 600

1963-1981

With its aircraft-style hydraulic systems, brand-new V8 engine, and flawless design by Paul Bracq, the Mercedes-Benz 600 redefined luxury and dethroned Rolls-Royce as the maker of the "world's best car." The standard-wheelbase 600 was the most popular version, but long-wheelbase Pullmans and rare open-top landaulets were also offered. Each car was highly individualised, with interiors often tailored to the original buyer's exact wishes. Values have surged recently, particularly for examples once owned by notable – or notorious – figures.

Engine/cyl/power 6,332cc/V8/247bhp **Transmission** 4-speed auto **Number built** 2,677 **Values** £80,000-£500,000/$100,000-$650,000 **Article** Autumn 2023

W108/109

1965-1972

The W108 was introduced as a successor to the six-cylinder Fintail, which was considered too similar to the four-cylinder variants to effectively capture the luxury car market. The lineup initially featured modest engines, including the 2.5-lit twin-carburettor or fuel-injected 250S/250SE models and the 3.0-litre 300SE. However, the standout – and now most coveted – version was the 1968 W109 300SEL 6.3, recognised as the world's first high-performance luxury sedan. Later, 3.5- and 4.5-litre V8 variants were added to boost its appeal, especially in the American market.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,496cc/6/128bhp - 6,332cc/V8/247bhp **Transmission** 4-speed automatic, 4-speed manual **Number built** 383,100 **Values** £25,000-£100,000/$30,000-$120,000 **Article date** Winter 2021

W114 coupe

1986-1976

Arriving nearly a year after the saloon, the W114 coupe featured a slightly lower profile but maintaining the same wheelbase and overall length, which resulted in an unusually long trunk. While some critics at the time found its proportions awkward, today that distinctive silhouette adds to its unique appeal. This two-door model was only produced with the W114 six-cylinder engine lineup, mirroring the saloon's powertrains. Among these, the 1972 280CE with the M110 engine remains the most popular thanks to its spirited performance. Unfortunately, only a handful of these pillarless coupes have survived to the present day.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,496cc/6/128bhp - 2746cc/6/182bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed automatic **Number built** 56,521 **Values** £15,000-£40,000/ $20,000-$50,000 **Article date** Spring 2020

R107 SL

1971-1989

Boasting the longest production run of any SL series by a wide margin, the graceful R107 was crafted with North American preferences in mind, featuring smooth V8 engines and a plush suspension setup. The lineup kicked off in 1974 with the six-cylinder 280SL as the budget-friendly option, while the range's pinnacle came in 1985 with the introduction of the powerful 5.6-litre 560SL during a facelift. However, it was the 450SL, produced from 1971 to 1980, that saw the greatest popularity, selling nearly 66,300 units. Today, well-maintained R107s of all engine types have soared in value on the collector market.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/175bhp – 5,547cc/V8/227bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed man, 4-speed auto **Number built** 237,287 **Values** £15,000-£120,000/ $20,000-$160,000 **Article** Winter '24

W114/115

1968-1976

In 1968, Mercedes-Benz introduced the 'New Generation' or 'Stroke 8' models – the W115 with four-cylinder engines and the W114 with six-cylinder powertrains – as successors to the aging Fintail. These saloons featured a simpler, more understated design that laid the foundation for the future E-Class styling. A wide range of engines was offered, but the standout was the 2.7-litre twin-cam M110, which was added just before the 1973 update. During that facelift, the front quarter windows were removed, and a padded 'safety' steering wheel was introduced for enhanced driver protection.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,988cc/4/54bhp - 2,746cc/6/182bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Number built** 1,843,328 **Values** £10,000-£30,000/$15,000-$40,000 **Article** Winter 2017

C107 SLC

1971-1981

Mercedes-Benz chose not to continue the tradition of the W111 coupe and cabriolet as S-Class-based models. Instead, the next flagship two-door was developed from the R107 SL platform, extending the wheelbase by 360mm while retaining the same interior and engine options – from a 2.8-litre six-cylinder to a 5.0-litre V8. For many years, the SLC flew under the radar with modest market values, but recently it has gained significant attention from collectors. Among the most sought-after are the homologation special 450SLC 5.0 and the 500SL models produced between 1978 and 1981.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/175bhp - 4,973cc/8/237bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 3/4-speed auto **Number built** 62,888 **Values** £15,000-£70,000/ $20,000-$95,000 **Article** Winter 2023

W/V116 S-Class

1972-1980

The introduction of the W116 SE and the extended V116 SEL models marked the arrival of the 'S-Class' name, firmly establishing it as the go-to vehicle for senior executives. The most popular variants were the 350SE/SEL and 450SEL, powered by 3.5- and 4.5-litre V8 engines, yet the range was bookended by the remarkable 450SEL 6.9 at the top and the six-cylinder 280SE/SEL at the entry level. Additionally, a turbocharged diesel version was specially developed for the North American market. For many years, the W116 S-Class was an overlooked Mercedes, but today well-preserved examples are highly sought after by collectors.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/154bhp - 6,834cc/V8/282bhp **Transmission** 3/4-speed automatic, 4/5-speed manual **Number built** 473,035 **Values** £15,000-£70,000/ $20,000-$90,000 **Article date** Winter 2022

W/V126 S-Class

1979-1992

With its understated styling and impressive technical and safety innovations, the 126-series firmly established the S-Class as the definitive luxury car, outclassing the BMW 7 Series in prestige and the Jaguar XJ6 in build quality and reliability. The standout model is the post-1985 560SEL, while the North America-only turbodiesel 300SDL and 350SDL enjoy a cult following there. Values are beginning to rise, but both standard-wheelbase (SE) and long-wheelbase (SEL) 126s in good condition still represent excellent value as emerging young classics.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,746cc/6/154bhp - 5,547cc/V8/296bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Number built** 818,036 **Values** £8,000-£35,000/ $10,000-$45,000 **Article** Autumn 2019

W/S123 saloon/estate

1976-1985

When it was launched in early 1976, the 123-series was hailed as Mercedes' most meticulously engineered model to date, a reputation well justified by its exceptional attention to detail and build quality. The saloon debuted first, available with a range of petrol and diesel engines, followed a year later by the estate – which stood out almost as a distinct model in its own right. Notably, the estate featured a space-saving rear suspension with self-levelling capabilities and a tailgate integrated into the crash safety cell. This estate variant has become the most sought-after member of the 123 family.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,988cc/4/54bhp - 2,746cc/v 6/182bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed automatic **Number built** 2,588,657 **Values** £12,000-£40,000/$15,000-$50,000 **Article dates** Winter, Spring 2024

C126 SEC

1981-1991

Following the C107, the S-Class-based SEC marked Mercedes-Benz's return to the luxury coupe segment in earnest. Its stunning pillarless design, combined with the sophistication of the 126-series saloon, made it highly desirable despite its premium price tag. Mercedes chose not to offer a six-cylinder variant; the entry-level model was initially the 380SEC, powered by a 3.8-litre V8. The most widely sold version was the five-litre 500SEC, yet the classic car community tends to favour the robust 296bhp 5.5-litre 560SEC, which was introduced during the facelift in September 1985.

Engine/cyl/power range 3,839cc/V8/201bhp - 5,547cc/V8/296bhp **Transmission** 4-speed automatic **Number built** 74,060 **Values** £20,000-£60,000/$25,000-$80,000 **Article** Summer 2024

C123 coupe

1977-1985

In contrast to the earlier W114 two-door coupe, the C123 featured a shorter wheelbase and overall length than the saloon, resulting in a more proportionate and balanced design. Before 1980, the entry-level model was the carburettor-equipped 2.3-litre 230C, which was later replaced by the fuel-injected 230CE. At the top of the range stood the 280CE, powered by the 2.8-litre M110 six-cylinder engine producing 183bhp. For the North American market, two diesel variants were offered: the naturally aspirated 300CD from 1977 to 1982, followed by the 300CD turbodiesel from 1981 to 1985.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,307cc/4/108bhp - 2,998cc/6/123bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed auto, 4-speed manual **Number built** 99,884 **Values** £15,000-£50,000/$20,000-$65,000 **Article** Winter 2018

W201 190E

1982-1993

Mercedes-Benz's return to the 'small' car segment in the early Eighties to rival the BMW 3-Series and Audi 80 proved highly successful, significantly boosting production volumes in Stuttgart. The range initially included two-litre carburettor and fuel-injected models (190 and 190E), with diesel variants and a 2.6-litre petrol six-cylinder engine arriving later. Renowned for its robust construction and straightforward mechanicals, the W201 is popular among DIY enthusiasts and offers affordable maintenance. Once considered bargain buys, these models have recently become sought-after young classics, steadily rising in value.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,997cc/4/104bhp - 2,599cc/6/164bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed manual, 4-speed auto **Number built**1,879,629 Values £5,000-£15,000/$6,500-$20,000 **Article** Autumn 2018

190E 2.3-/2.5-16/Evolution/Evolution II

1984-1993

To compete with the BMW M3, Mercedes-Benz introduced the 190E 2.3-16, a homologation special designed to qualify the W201 for motorsport. Initially powered by a 2.3-litre engine featuring a Cosworth-designed 16-valve cylinder head, it was upgraded to a 2.5-litre 190E 2.5-16 at the 1988 facelift. As competition in the DTM intensified, Mercedes developed the car further, unveiling the Evolution and later that same year, the Evolution II. This ultimate version has recently achieved legendary status, with low-mileage examples – rare as they are – fetching over £300,000 at auction.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,229cc/4/175bhp - 2,463cc/4/232bhp **Number built** 26,234 **Values** 190E 2.3-/2.5-16, £20,000-£50,000/$25,000-$65,000; Evo/II £100,000-£330,000 /$130,000-$435,000 **Article** Summer 2022

500E/E500/E60

1991-1995

In the early Nineties, Mercedes-Benz commissioned Porsche to fit the SL's five-litre V8 engine into the W124 chassis. The result was this iconic Q-car masterpiece. Resembling a standard W124 except for its wider wheel arches, the 500E – renamed the E500 from mid-1993 – delivered effortless power while providing a luxuriously comfortable ride. Although no right-hand drive versions were produced, it was still officially sold in the UK. In recent years, its desirability has grown considerably among collectors, particularly the Limited Edition E500. Additionally, a small, undisclosed number of the six-litre E60 models were produced during 1993 and 1994.

Engine/cyl/power 4,973cc/V8/ 316, 322bhp **Transmission** 4-speed automatic **Number built**10,479 (all LHD) **Values** £25,000-£80,000/$33,000-$100,000 **Article date** Winter 2023

W/S/C/C124 saloon/estate/coupe/cabriolet

1984-1997

The 124-series began in 1984 with the launch of the W124 saloon, followed by the S124 estate in 1985. The sleek, pillarless C124 coupe arrived in 1987, available as the 200CE, 230CE, and 300CE, adding a touch of elegance to the range. The two-door body style was further expanded with the introduction of the A124 cabriolet in 1991, Mercedes' first full four-seat convertible in two decades. Many favour the pre-1992/1993 facelift models, often referred to as the 'big grille' cars, notable for their simpler two-valve engines and the classic star badge mounted on the grille instead of the bonnet.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,996cc/4/120bhp - 3,199cc/6/217bhp **Transmission** 5-speed manual, 4/5-speed automatic **Number built** 2,729,120 **Values** £6,000-£20,000/$8,000-$25,000 **Article date** Winter 2022 (saloon)

C36/C43 AMG

1993-2000

Featuring the M104 four-valve engine – which was enlarged from 3.2 to 3.6 litres and fitted with larger valves – alongside an upgraded chassis made the C36 the first of the hotter W202 C-Class sold by Mercedes. The C36 retained the character of a traditional tuned car, exhibiting a firmer ride and a bit more harshness. Its successor, the 1997 C43 AMG, brought significantly more refinement, powered by the smooth yet potent 4.2-litre M113 V8. While the C36 was only available as a saloon, the C43 was also offered as a wagon. Both models are edging towards classic status, although widespread rust issues do hold back their values.

Engine/cyl/power range 3,606cc/6/276bhp - 4,266cc/V8/302bhp **Transmission** 4/5-speed auto **Number built** 5,221/3,857 **Values** £10,000-£30,000/$13,000-$40,000 **Article** Winter 2018

R129 SL

1989-2001

Seen by many as the last of the true young timers, the R129 embodies the same classic Mercedes-Benz styling and solid build quality as its predecessors. It was available with a broad selection of engines, ranging from a 2.8-litre unit in the SL280 to a powerful 7.3-litre V12 in the SL73. Among the most popular were the 500SL/SL500 and the SL320. Although it arguably lacks the timeless elegance of the R107, the R129 is only now gaining traction with collectors – particularly the six-litre SL60 AMG produced between 1993 and 1998, which can command prices up to £50,000. Meanwhile, the six-cylinder variants remain accessible and practical classic cars.

Engine/cyl/power range 2,799cc/6/190bhp - 7,291cc/V12/518bhp **Transmission** 5-speed man, 4/5-speed auto **Number built** 237,287 **Values** £10,000-£50,000/$15,000-$70,000 **Article** Winter 2023

C/A/W/S 124 E36 AMG

1993-1996

The 124-series, offered in four distinct body styles, was among the first wave of officially sanctioned AMG models to be sold through Mercedes-Benz dealerships from 1993 and 1994. Each variant was equipped with the AMG-tuned 3.6-litre engine also found in the C36 AMG, complemented by upgraded springs and dampers. A body kit was available as an optional extra. Although official production figures were never released, it's known that the UK received 24 coupés, 14 cabriolets, 12 saloons and just seven estates. These cars command a premium over standard W124 models, yet they remain relatively under the radar.

Engine/cyl/power 3,606cc/6/268bhp **Transmission** 4-speed automatic **Number built** undisclosed **Values** £20,000-£40,000/$25,000-$50,000 **Article** Issue 2

R170 SLK

1995-2004

When it arrived in 1995, the R170 Mercedes-Benz SLK was a landmark model, reintroducing the compact roadster to the brand's line-up and debuting the innovative folding metal 'Vario-roof'. This feature combined coupe comfort with open-top motoring at the push of a button, setting a trend in the segment. Engines ranged from the 2.0-litre four-cylinder in early SLK 200s to the supercharged SLK 230 Kompressor, with the range-topping SLK 32 AMG offering a potent 3.2-litre V6. The SLK's blend of style, technology and everyday usability made it hugely popular, particularly in Europe, and it played a key role in reviving the small premium roadster market.

Engine/cyl/power range 1,998/4/135bhp – 1,998cc/4/192bhp – 2,295/4/193bhp – 3,199/V6/218bhp – 3,199cc/V6/354bhp **Transmission** 5-speed manual, 6-speed manual, 5-speed auto **Number built** 311,222 **Values** £1,500-£15,000 **Article** Sept-Oct 2025

W168 A-Class

1997-2004

Launched in 1997, the first-generation Mercedes-Benz A-Class (W168) marked a bold departure for the brand, introducing its first compact, front-wheel-drive model. Designed with a clever 'sandwich floor' to enhance crash safety and maximise interior space, it was a revolutionary city car for Mercedes. Initial controversy followed the infamous "elk test" failure, prompting a swift suspension redesign. Engine options ranged from 1.4 to 2.1 litres, including petrol and diesel variants. Despite early setbacks, the A-Class proved popular, especially in Europe, attracting younger buyers and those seeking a premium small car. It laid the groundwork for Mercedes' future in compact vehicle segments.

Engine/cyl/power range Petrol: 1,397cc/4/81bhp –1,598cc/81bhp & 102bhp/4 – 1,898cc/4/125bhp – 2,084cc/4/140bhp – 3,199cc/V6/151bhp Diesel: 1,689cc/4/60bhp, 75bhp, 91bhp & 95bhp **Transmission** 5-speed manual, 5-speed auto **Number built** 1.16million **Values** £1,000-£8,000 **Article** N/A

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10862

MERCEDES 300SL

1989, £54,950. 39,00 miles. Smoke Grey, brown soft top, matching hard top. Described by SL Shop in 2024 as "immaculate". Please call 07801656802, Surrey

10605

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£3,995. 2004, one lady owner from new. 77000 miles from new. MOT until August. Metallic silver with black leather. Stunning unmarked condition. Please call 07904 429655, London

10500

MERCEDES S320

£3,200. 2003. 157777 km, £2-300 repairs done, silver, 2 owners, sun roof, straight six engine, garaged. Please call 353087 9303992, Dublin

10563

MERCEDES 190E

£4,250. 1.8 petrol auto K-Reg May 1993, 119k with 17 services manuals, handbooks, brochure, elec sliding sunroof, MOT April 2026, Hpi clear, 4 electric windows, bluetooth Sony cd, totally original, 3 keys, new battery, full inspection service £450 just spent garaged, £4250, can deliver anywhere. Please call 07895 675851, South West

10687

CLASSIC 1989 MERCEDES 190 AUTOMATIC

1989, £5,500. With a smooth running petrol engine and automatic gearbox this is a fine example of the classic Mercedes 190. Owned by the same family since new in 1989 the car is in good condition. Tax and MoT valid until the 24th October. Ready for the road or perfect for a light restoration project, this is a very usable classic. Please call 01202 764636, Dorset

10608

MERCEDES 280SL

£10,750. 1997. P/X WHY Mercedes 280SL MET/black mushroom leather. Immaculate in and out drives superb recorded miles 58,000 history and bills wheels and tyres as new hard and soft tops. Please call 07970 490687, St Annes

10890

MERCEDES R129 SL 280

1995, £6,500. 110,000 miles 3 former owners, Azurite blue with mushroom leather, MOT August 2025. Very well-maintained example with comprehensive MB/independent specialist history. Hardtop stand, battery isolator, 2 keys and bespoke dust cover included. Reducing car collection due to relocation. Approaching LEZ exemption status. Please call 0131 557 9246 Edinburgh.

MERCEDES 280SL AUTOMATIC

£9,995. 1996. Azurite blue tan leather seats front and rear, clean rust free body and undercarriage soft top replaced 2013 have owned 6 years MOT Nov 25 110,000 miles, drives as new, please phone for history, reluctant sale. Please call 07775 289306, Glasgow

10744

MERCEDES BENZ E36, A.M.G., AVANTGARDE W210

1997, £25,000. One of only 60 right hand drive cars built (11 UK, 49 Australia) with a total build of 399, last cars built by A.M.G. before merger with Mercedes Benz. Very rare car in original and excellent condition. With full history. Please call 00441534870393, Jersey

10843

MERCEDES E280 CDI AVANTGARDE DIESEL

2007, £2,295. Automatic, black. 2 owners. Service history. Leather interior. E/windows, alloy wheels, air conditioning, 12 months MOT in immaculate condition, luxury Mercedes E280 Avantgarde. Please call 07527 446242, Wales

50

MERCEDES-BENZ 200

2004, £4,250. CLK 200 auto Avantguarde 1.8 Kompressor engine/Supercharged, Cubinite Silver, full black leather, 3 owners, 60500m, full service history, electric sunroof, AMG wheels and sports suspension, MOT March 2005, excellent paintwork, low mileage as car used as a second car. This 20 year old car has no rust and was galvanised from new. Please call 07507388003, South West

1294

MERCEDES 230TE ESTATE AUTO

POA. 1988, 73,000mls only. 2 owners. Many extras ie: c/control, p/windows, tow bar, alloys, etc. & new parts. ie: exhaust, tyres, brakes, g/box, rad, w/pump, batt, etc. over £9000 spent. Very clean in & out, needs h/gasket, runs fine. Offers, wanted Volvo estate/hearse 265/245 type, +-1980's, or sim. Please call 01277 200530, South East.

MERCEDES-BENZ CLK

2004, £11,250. CLK 500 Convertible Avantgarde, Black/Black Leather, Factory AMG Body Kit and Wheels, Genuine 26000 miles with FSH, Very High Spec, MOT Oct 25. Please call 07730456480, Greater London

1282

MERCEDES 420SL (R107)

£49,500. 1987. Light Ivory with matching hardtop, contrasting leather interior and brown soft top. Current owner over 20 years. Extensive history file. Totally standard, has original tool kit, first aid, book pack, fire extinguisher and radio. Stunning condition. Leeds. Please call 07770784690, Yorkshire and the Humber

MERCEDES BENZ CLK 500 CABRIOLET 2DR PETROL AUTOMATIC

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40582 mi

2003, £7950. 278 g/km, 306 bhp. Convertible Mercedes CLK 500 in silver - very good condition and low mileage. Mileage - 40582. Fuel type - Petrol. Body type - Convertible. Engine - 5.0L. Gearbox - Automatic. Doors - 2. Oxted, Surrey. Please call 07887743151, South East

MERCEDES BENZ COUPE

Offers over £1000. 2001. Orange Mercedes Benz Coupe, immaculate interior, engine running, ULEZ compliant. Unused since 2017, left outside. Mileage- 27,000. MOT ran out, 1 flat tyre and flat battery, requires recovery from NE31. Lovely project, offers over £1000. Please call 07989142822, London

MERCEDES L306 2.2D PICK-UP

£1500. Year 1977. Mileage 118,000 miles. Extremely rare, simple body on robust chassis, cab needs restoring. Some repair panels included, spare windscreen and other spares. Brake pipes replaced. Should be viewed. Buyer collects. Please call 01207 529767, Durham

10683

MERCEDES UNIMOG 404

£4,950. 1959/60. 12,500 miles. Registered 1965 L/H/D. Petrol, been kept as protection for field fires only. Starts and drives well. Hose reels, pump, tank, tools, PTO, crew cab. History and books. Please call 07814 658275, East of England

10365

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£395. Part number A2054019600. More photos available on whatsapp or call. Please call 07936-151814, Merseyside

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POA. From Jan 2015 (£4.30) to Mar 2016, all in very good order. Please call 07447 941524, South West.

R107 SL REAR BUMPER

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10958

MERCEDES EXHAUST, ELECTRIC MIRROR AND HEADLAMP

£50-£500. Mercedes original, new unused w123 230e exhaust complete £500, w123 driver side electric mirror vgc £50. Also driver side headlamp, bosh vgc £100, Surrey. Please call 01883 348187, Surrey

11004

4 MERCEDES MEXICAN HAT 14INCH ALLOY WHEELS

£100. Refurbished as new, Surrey area. Please call 01883 348187, Surrey

11001

MERCEDES 280CE/230CE UPPER DOOR WINDOW SEALS & ALLY ROOF TRIM CLADDING

£220. The Seals and Cladding Trims were taken off my 1983 280CE and replaced with new ones from Mercedes-Benz. There is some cracking of the external side rubber sections but could be fixed using superglue and shoe polish. Cheltenham. Please call 07576315669, South West.

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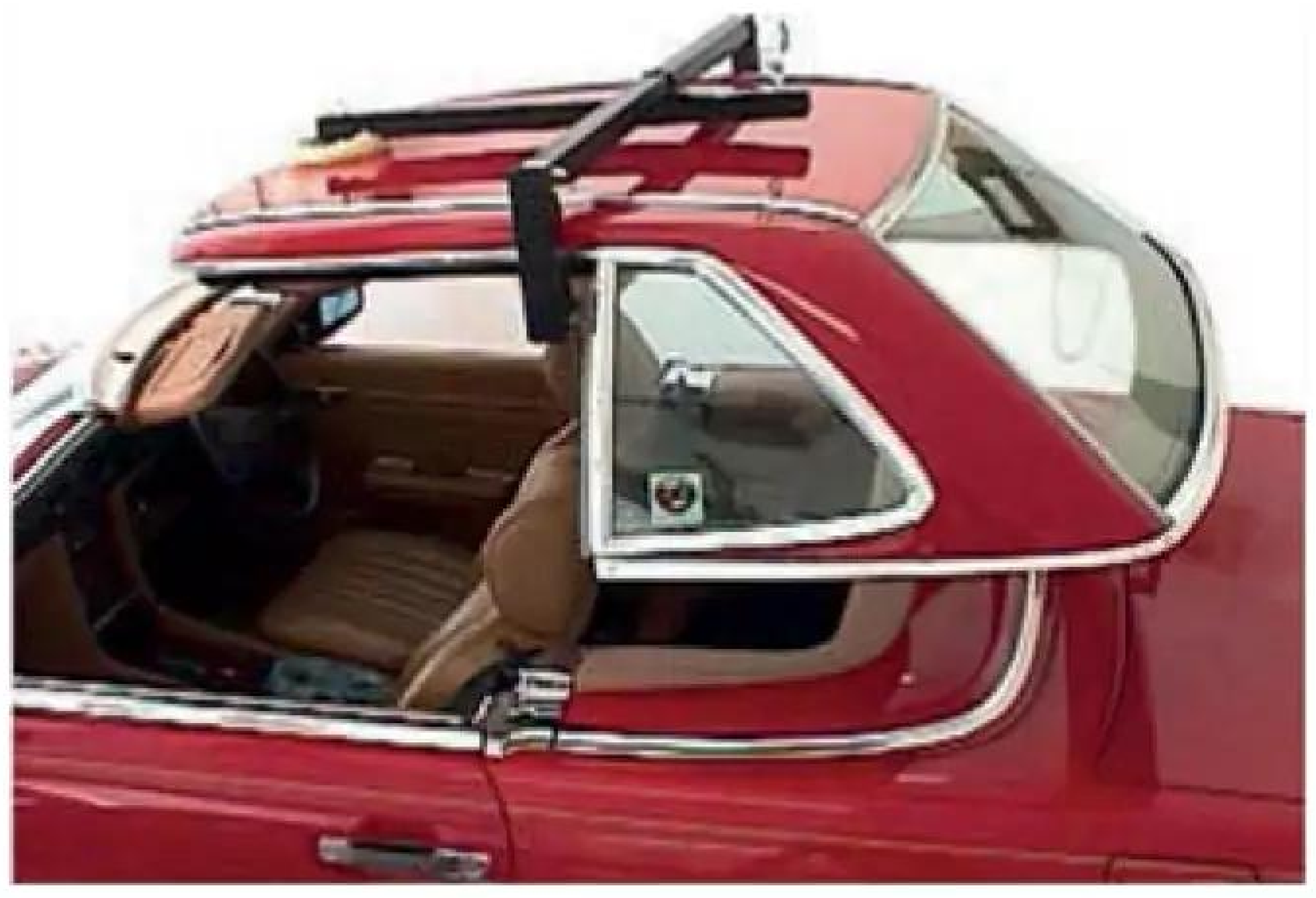

£225. Barely used, but no longer required. For collection from Faversham, Kent. Save yourself some money on the new price of £595. Bargain £225. Faversham. Please call 07774622782, South East

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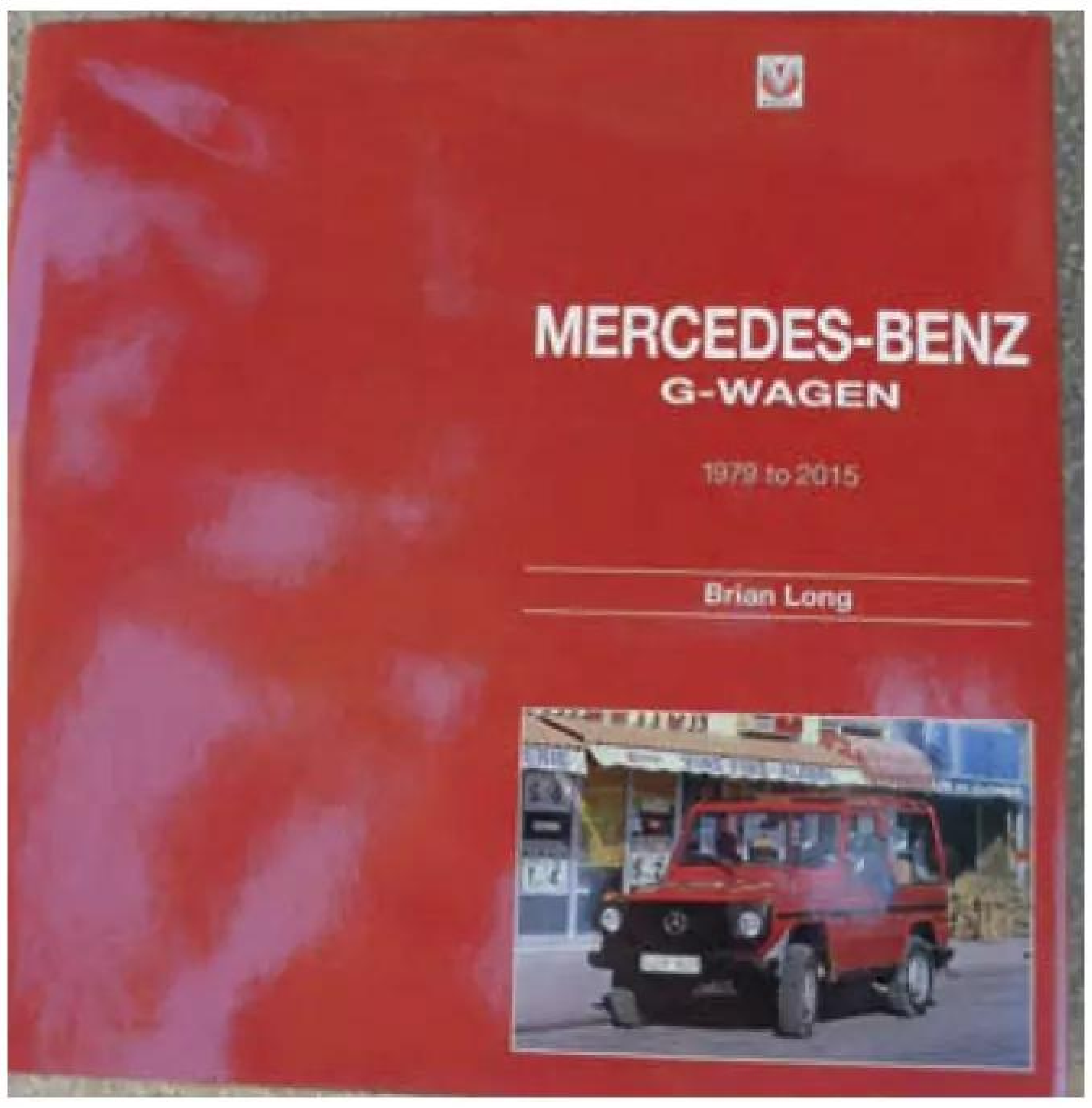

£20 incl post. Please call 07534 342021, Harrogate

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REGISTRATION

£19500. On retention. 126 MPH. Bought for a Pagoda (126 mph top speed) in the seventies but looked good on many cars since. Completely compliant with the law (no spacing problems) Please call 0208 366 4639, Greater London.

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PARTS FOR R129

Wanted. Steering idler arm bushing for a 2001 SL500 Silver Arrow. Have tried the usual parts places in the UK and Europe without success! Please call 07359 017584, South East.

MERCEDES C. CLASS

Wanted. 1994 to 1999. Low mil. One or two owners auto. Service history. Immaculate. Will travel. Please call 07787 802941, Manchester

10811

NEXT ISSUE

ON SALE SEPTEMBER 26 2025

R129 SL 5.5 AMG

We get behind the wheel of the ultra-rare AMG 5.5-litre version of the R129 SL

W114 buying guide

Every needed to know to buy this iconic Mercedes-Benz saloon from the Sixties

30 years of McLaren Mercedes

From early disappointment to world championships, we look at the three-decade history of this successful partnership

High mileage W124

It might not look it but this immaculate 300D from 1991 has covered close to 310,000 miles. We talk to its owner about the car's history

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AMG CLE 53 Coupé

With its aggressive looks and powerful turbocharged six-cylinder engine, the CLE 53 gets close to being proper, old-school AMG

IT COULD be argued that by making it more of a trim level, available on any model from entry saloons to electric SUVS, Mercedes-Benz has diluted the AMG brand. With most AMG variants have nothing more than an off the shelf aero package and a slight increase in power, they lack the aura of the earliest Affalterbach cars such as the 190E 3.2 'Baby Hammer' featured in this issue or the first jointly developed model, the C63, undeniably have.

The exception to this is the CLE 53 Coupé. With the basic design already having a masculine appearance, the AMG specific radiator trim, front air dam, side skirts, rear apron, spoiler lip and 20in alloy wheels make it appear much more aggressive in an old fashioned way. Get one in black or graphic grey and it will have all the presence of AMG's earliest cars.

Of course, AMG made its name by making Mercedes' cars faster and this basic requirement hasn't changed since the 53 is powered by an engine not found elsewhere in the CLE range, a turbocharged 3.0-litre straight six. Although more of a breathed-on standard unit – similar to what you get in the CLE 450 but with twin turbos – rather than a full hand-made Affalterbach product it still produces a healthy 442bhp.

Not as quick as the car's thuggish image would have you believe or perhaps worthy of the AMG pedigree, it still offers a strong performance, reaching 62mph in a brisk 4.2 seconds. As *Autocar* magazine said when it tested the car in early 2025, "The car's second, electrically assisted turbo allows for strong low speed response, the Merc's muscular delivery tailing off only slightly as the six-pot spins its way toward the redline."

Slightly stiffer suspension and immediate steering results in a more focused car than the standard CLE especially with the Sport modes that sharpens engine responsiveness, gear shifting plus the suspension and steering setups, making them significantly firmer. But it doesn't have the ultra-tight damping as the AMG C63 for example, or the rear bias to its four-wheel drive system that would give it a more playful side.

There's no denying by becoming more mainstream AMG has lost a little of the specialness of the tuning company's first models. But thanks to its muscular image and improved performance, the CLE 53 gets close to AMG's halcyon days of the Eighties and Nineties and of all the current range, one that will undoubtedly go down in history as one of the more interesting ones.

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